

GENTS

LADIES

Volume 28 Number 1 Winter 1987 £3.95 \$9.50

SCREEN

INCORPORATING SCREEN EDUCATION

3211-7548



5 00009

deconstructing
'difference'

DIFFERENCE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

AN INTRODUCTION TO THIS ISSUE
BY MANDY MERCK

¹ Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, p. xix.

² Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* Autumn 1975, vol. 16 no. 3, p. 13.

³ Parveen Adams, 'Note on Sexual Division and Sexual Differences', *m/f*, 1979, p. 52. (Note the variance between the singular 'sexual difference' and the plural 'differences' produced in representation.)

FOR MORE THAN a decade, the theory of sexual difference has exerted a profound influence upon cultural analysis. A precise history of its terminology (with dated encounters between the discourses of semiotics, psychoanalysis and feminism) would provide a fascinating account of the provenance of a problematic which—as problematics will—seems to have got underway long before anyone thought to offer a prospectus for it. In her preface to *Post-Partum Document*, Mary Kelly recalls:

... in 1973, the problem of 'the feminine psychology of the mother' seemed to be posed as if it were an effect of the sexual division of labour; but there was also an insistence on the 'reciprocity of the process of socialization' which suggested that the notion of 'subjectivity', especially one founded on Freud's theory of the unconscious, might displace the more familiar rhetoric of 'ideological oppression' as indeed it eventually did. Juliet Mitchell introduced that position in *Women's Estate* and consolidated it with *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. . . . in 1976 the Lacanian rereading of Freud was underway. The *Patriarchy Conference* in London that same year clearly indicated that the debate had shifted from the terms of sexual division to the question of sexual difference.¹

Certainly by 1975, 'sexual difference' was confidently deployed in *Screen* as the Lacanian signified: 'the meaning of woman is sexual difference, the absence of the penis as visually ascertainable, the material evidence on which is based the castration complex essential for the organisation of entrance to the symbolic order and the law of the father.'²

But it took another four years for the British feminist journal *m/f* to declare the advantages of 'difference':

*As long as feminist theories of ideology work with a theory of representation within which representation is always a representation of reality... the analysis of sexual difference cannot be advanced because reality is always already apparently structured by sexual division, by an already antagonistic relation between two social groups. . . . In terms of sexual differences, on the other hand, what has to be grasped is precisely the production of differences through systems of representation: the work of representation produces differences that cannot be known in advance.*³

This aspiration—to semiotise subjectivity, as it were, to think its differences as the work of representation rather than some pre-existing social or biological reality—has remained the ambition of this theory. It

argues for a fundamental 'affinity between representation and sexuality', in Jacqueline Rose's phrase, linking the chains of association produced in Freud's consulting room to the signifying chain borrowed from semiotics by Lacan. The aim is a theory of subjectivity both as arbitrary – and as structured – as language. Indeed, the famous analogy drawn by Lacan – between the structure of the unconscious and that of language is tightened into active reciprocity:

*The fixing of language and the fixing of sexual identity go hand in hand; they rely on each other and share the same forms of instability and risk.*⁴

Sexual difference theory has not gone without critique or revision, but it is notable that much of this argument has come, until recently anyway, from within the problematic, defending true difference against false, *this* difference against 'that difference (which is to deny any difference...)', but always assuming the value of the term. Thus Stephen Heath's 1978 essay, which attempts to rescue 'difference' from 'biology and myth'.⁵ His opponent in this struggle is Jacques Lacan, charged with naturalising the signification of difference by reference to the body: the role of the male genitals in copulation (*Écrits*); the epistemological supremacy of vision – and thus of the most visible organ (*Séminaire II*); and the physical origin of the signifier (*Séminaire XI*):

*it is through sexual reality that the signifier came into the world.*⁶

This ambivalent biologism is traced back to Freud's later writings on Oedipality, female homosexuality and anatomy, in which genital variations are, of course, grossly significant – despite repeated stipulations about the extensive autonomy of psychic development, the general tendency towards bisexual identification, and the famous proviso that 'pure masculinity and femininity remain theoretical constructions of uncertain content'.

This last statement, with its fertile intimations of semiosis, of 'constructions' without pre-given 'content', has become the virtual motto of difference theorists, securing the Freudian genealogy of their project. However, a more contextualised citation of Freud's observation than, for instance, that provided in the catalogue of the 1985 *Difference* exhibition⁷, offers rather different prospects for its political appropriation, since it is thrown almost as a sop to 'the feminists... anxious to force us to regard the two sexes as completely equal in position and worth.' Pure gender differentiation, Freud concedes, may be an impossible abstraction, but even in its impure state the threat castration poses uniquely to men produces their superior super-egos, senses of justice, impartiality of judgement and readiness 'to submit to the great exigencies of life'.⁸

And here, too, at castration, Heath finally abandons his attempt to retrieve psychoanalytic theory from the myth of difference, instead proposing it as 'itself, and powerfully, an institution of representation' –

⁴ Jacqueline Rose, 'Sexuality in the Field of Vision', in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, London, Verso, 1986, p 229.

⁵ Stephen Heath, 'Difference', *Screen* Autumn 1978, vol 19 no 3, pp 51-112.

⁶ Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire XI*, p 138, cited *ibid*, p 66.

⁷ Lisa Tickner, 'Sexuality and/in Representation', in *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality*, 1985, p 19.

⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes' (1925), in *On Sexuality*, vol 7 Pelican Freud Library, Harmondsworth, 1977, p 342.

as a suitable object for semiotic enquiry rather than an unproblematic ally in that enterprise. In a memorable conclusion, he splits the psychoanalytic discovery of 'the fundamental instability of production and realisation' from the stability of its Oedipal apparatus, 'a new machine that reassures the same identifications, the same novelistic in which cinema is invested, the same difference'. (The last phrase, as we'll see, indignantly recurs in recent gay considerations of 'difference'.)

It's surprising, especially given the influence of Heath's other writings on the cinema, that these arguments scarcely impeded the rush to Lacan in the cultural analysis of the late '70s. It's possible to discover implicit replies (most rigorously in the work of Jacqueline Rose, who would presumably identify Heath's attempt to split the unconscious from castration with Ernest Jones' 'pre-psychoanalytic' critique of Freudian phallogentrism). But it seems incredible that Teresa de Lauretis, for example, could consider *Screen's* work in a book on feminism, semiotics and cinema completed in 1983 and simply ignore Heath's *volte face*. (To support her own refutation of anti-psychoanalytic arguments, de Lauretis replays the 1975 debate between Julia Lesage and members of the *Screen* editorial board, including Heath, criticising Lesage's lack of familiarity with Lacan. There is no mention of Heath's critical return to Lacan three years later.)⁹

But if Heath's challenge to Lacanian 'difference' failed, somehow, to be taken up, another *Screen* essay, Laura Mulvey's sexual differentiation of both cinema's text and spectator, stimulated a rash of attempted refutations. One of the most ubiquitous essay topics in Anglophone film studies must be:

*Discuss: 'In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female.... Mainstream film neatly combined spectacle and narrative.... An active/passive heterosexual division of labour has similarly controlled narrative structure.'*¹⁰

This observation has provoked the replies of, *inter alia*,

— D N Rodowick, who challenges its 'fixed polarity' of masculine and feminine positions, its equation of cinematic and psychic processes, its neglect of spectatorial resistance, its homogenised depiction of the classic realist film;¹¹

— John Ellis, who contests its model of masculine identification, arguing that cinematic identification is 'multiple and fractured';¹²

— Janet Walker, who criticises its lack of distinction between the reading and the text, its 'denial of a female position' of spectatorship, and its male/not-male binarism;¹³

— Steve Neale, who cites voyeuristic and fetishistic looking by male characters at male characters in the western and the epic;¹⁴

— Ian Green, who adumbrates the narrative mechanisms which encourage male viewers to identify with the female protagonists of melodrama and *film noir*;¹⁵

⁹ Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*, London, Macmillan, 1984, pp 162-166. (Note the omission of Heath's arguments also from Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1983.)

¹⁰ Laura Mulvey, *op cit*, pp 11-12.

¹¹ D N Rodowick, 'The Difficulty of Difference', *Wide Angle*, vol 5 no 1, pp 4-15.

¹² John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982.

¹³ Janet Walker, 'The Problem of Sexual Difference and Identity', *Wide Angle*, vol 6 no 3, pp 16-23.

¹⁴ Steve Neale, 'Masculinity as Spectacle', *Screen* November-December 1983, vol 24 no 6, pp 2-16.

¹⁵ Ian Green, 'Malefunction', *Screen* July-October 1984, vol 25 nos 4-5, pp 36-48.

— And, not least and undoubtedly not last, Mulvey herself, who in 1981 turned to the question of the female spectator, discovering her in the awkward position afforded by the binary structure of the 1975 essay. In an analogy drawn with the quandary of Pearl Chavez in *Duel in the Sun*, the female spectator is argued to oscillate between a ladylike feminine passivity and a libidinal tomboyish activity. But the latter, active, identification has a tragic destiny, since (in Mulvey's scheme, anyway) it is always conceived as masculine, and therefore not only transgressive but 'transvestite', in the sense of an unbearable imposture, 'at cross purposes with itself'.¹⁶

Still later, in an article published in 1985, Mulvey begins to criticise this 'typology of dualism', acknowledging the force of Heath's critique and Jane Gallop's contention that sexual difference 'represented as polar opposition... and all other polar oppositions share the trait of taming the anxiety that specific differences provoke.' Following Jacqueline Rose, she then suggests 'taking present psycho-analytic theory to its limits', limits which Rose sees Lacan as implicitly admitting when 'he relegates women outside, and against, the very mastery of his own statement'. Mulvey searches for this way out in, successively, Kristeva's 'semiotic' (i.e., the symbolically uncontainable elements of discourse); the pre-Oedipal bond with the Mother; Bakhtin's concept of Carnival as ritualised transgression; and van Gennep's theory of liminality, a transitional mid-point between rites of separation and reincorporation. 'A feminist perspective,' she concludes, 'should insist on the need to prolong the middle phase, that so easily becomes masked or telescoped behind binary opposition, as the point of disruption and contradiction, the point at which politics can be inserted into both cultural and psycho-analytic terrains.'¹⁷

Among such politics would be those from lesbian and gay perspectives, since so many theories of sexual difference have criticised phallogentrism as precisely a homo-sexual enterprise, denying the 'heterogeneity' of femininity. (In this loosely analogical style of argument, 'difference' and 'heterogeneity' figure as parallel terms of value to the 'open' text.) Where Jane Gallop follows Irigaray (and indeed Freud) to posit 'a sublimated male homosexuality structuring all our institutions'¹⁸, Kristeva extends the critique to all 'perverts':

*And we know the role that the pervert — invincibly believing in the maternal phallus, obstinately refusing the existence of the other sex — has been able to play in antisemitism and the totalitarian movements that embrace it. Let us remember the fascist or socialist homosexual community (and all homosexual communities for whom there is no 'other race'), inevitably flanked by a community of Amazons who have forgotten the war of the sexes and identify with the paternal word and its serpent.*¹⁹

Conceived within a dualism which is, as Kristeva has admitted, conjugated anatomically²⁰, homosexuality can only be thought as a disavowal

¹⁶ Laura Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Inspired by "Duel in the Sun"', *Framework* 15-16-17, 1981, p 15.

¹⁷ Laura Mulvey, 'Changes', *Discourse* Fall 1985, p 28.

¹⁸ Jane Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction*, London, Macmillan, 1982, p 64.

¹⁹ Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, London, Marion Boyars, 1977, p 23. Compare Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986, p 310: 'heterosexual arousal is arousal by something through and through other than oneself, and other as flesh.... In the homosexual act I remain locked within my body, narcissistically contemplating in the other an excitement that is the mirror of my own.'

²⁰ Louise Burchill, 'The Last Word of Adventure' (interview with Julia Kristeva), *On the Beach* no 6, 1984, p 25.

of difference. No non-genital differences (of race, class, age, etc) can signify such total Otherness, no genitally similar object can be legitimately eroticised.

Thus the polite silences of the 'difference' school, which – even when not consciously antagonistic in the Kristevan mode – is largely unable to theorise homosexuality. So the question could only enter the *Oxford Literary Review* 'Sexual Difference' conference under the heading of 'masculinity'²¹ (female homosexuality, as Mary Kelly notes in this issue, being a persistently absent term), while an exhibition titled *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* masked it off altogether. (The latter exhibition produced a reply in the US journal *Exposure*²² and a virtual counter-exhibition in London, both dubbed 'The Same Difference'²³ – a phrase which can be read to criticise the hypostatisation of heterosexual difference in contemporary theory or to claim an equivalent ratio of difference, and desire, for homosexuality.)

This brings us to Jackie Stacey's argument in this issue for the inscription of a female homoeroticism based on difference in mainstream cinema. In both her examples, *All about Eve* and *Desperately Seeking Susan*, an ingenue desires the power and sophistication of a more experienced woman, which she attempts to put on like a suit of clothes (Susan's jacket, Margot's costume). Such a self-enhancing, incorporative desire might seem to bear out the anti-homosexual bias of difference theory, since it conforms to Freud's third example of the narcissist's love objects: 'what he himself (sic) would like to be'. But as Constance Penley has noted, Freud's opposition of ego and object love neglects 'the fundamentally narcissistic nature of all object relations', if they begin with the child's fascination with its own image in the Lacanian mirror.²⁴ Although Penley doesn't pursue this observation, the solipsism it describes is a conventional element in the Lacanian account of subjectivity and one which would trouble any simple distinction between a heterosexual recognition of Otherness and a homosexual denial.

Interestingly, the theory of Otherness itself – which has underwritten so much feminist analysis since de Beauvoir's critical citation of Levinas' *Le Temps et l'Autre* in her introduction to *The Second Sex* – has remained relatively exempt from the criticisms levelled at the dualism and ahistoricism supposedly besetting 'sexual difference'. Of course, the discourse of Otherness has historically embraced all manner of philosophical and cultural distinctions, as well as those pertaining to gender and the psyche, notably in the Hegelian-derived metaphysics of the Existentialists and the structural anthropology of Lévi-Strauss. De Beauvoir's introduction traverses this history, arguing that the self-other 'duality' was not originally attached to the division of the sexes; it was not dependent upon any empirical facts.... Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought.²⁵

This frankly ontological claim has elicited one notorious rebuttal from a modern feminist. Although she dedicated *The Dialectic of Sex* to de Beauvoir, Shulamith Firestone maintained that these philosophical cate-

²¹ See the 'Masculine Sexuality I' section of *Sexual Difference: Oxford Literary Review*, vol 8 nos 1-2, 1986, pp 5-27.

²² Martha Geyer and Nathalie Maguan, 'The Same Difference: On Lesbian Representation', *Exposure Summer* 1986, vol 24 no 2, pp 27-34.

²³ Held at the Camerawork Gallery, July 1986.

²⁴ Constance Penley, 'Feminism, Film Theory and the Bachelor Machines', *m/f* 10, 1985, p 50.

²⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972, pp 16-17.

²⁶ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, New York, Bantam Books, 1971, p 11.

gories grew out of the history of sexual division, and she calmly predicted the Hegelian resolution which her mentor believed impossible. Just as the proletariat would eventually seize the means of production, so women would revolt and seize those of reproduction, taking charge of medical technologies to cybernate pregnancy and break the bonds of the mother/child dyad, thus liberating both women and children. The result would be 'not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex distinction itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally.'²⁶

Firestone's cutting of the Gordian knot may be characterised by the gay abandon of early '70s radicalism, but it did anticipate more sober critiques of the 'tragic ontology' which de Beauvoir imported from *Being and Nothingness*, in which individual consciousnesses must remain in perpetual conflict, as well as her acceptance of the Sartrean gendering of immanence (feminine) and transcendence (masculine).²⁷ Indeed, Kate Soper seemed to echo Firestone when she wrote recently that *The Second Sex* 'tends to betray its own argument. Thus, the central, and basically correct theory that women are "made" not "born" could have been so much more powerfully pressed home had de Beauvoir spent less time describing the symptoms of "otherness" in the "product" and more on analysis of the fundamental economic and social structures that have gone into its "making"'.²⁸

In addition to raising the contradictory implications of 'otherness' Firestone's polemic possesses the immense charm of (theoretically) *doing something* about sexual difference—abolishing its significance. This is hardly the self-evident logic of the problematic, which has produced extremely varied recommendations:

- 1) to celebrate an oppositional feminine difference (*à la* certain French feminists, notably Irigaray);²⁹
- 2) to frankly abandon the Lacanian idea of the phallus as arbitrarily significant, and concede a biological ground to psycho-sexual duality (Andrew Parker);³⁰
- 3) to multiply the categories of difference in order to displace the oppressive hierarchy of a single, over-arching dualism: 'pluralize, refine, continuously'³¹ (Barthes and Jane Gallop, who repeatedly calls attention to differences *between women*³²);
- 4) to criticise the foundations of sexual difference in the dualist oppositions of western metaphysics, while refusing to pursue a dialectical conclusion, which would 'erase the difference and...enter homogeneity' (Derrida);³³
- 5) to oppose both Lacan and Irigaray by separating the psychical process of sexual differentiation from that of identity in symbolisation. This, it is argued, would detach the socially validated hierarchy of male/not-male from the self/other distinction, producing woman as 'other than not-male', rather than 'other and not-male' (Monique Plaza).³⁴

Plaza's argument offers a useful point at which to introduce the remaining articles in this issue, since in the opening essay, Dugald

²⁷ e.g. Toril Moi, 'Existentialism and Feminism', *Sexual Difference: Oxford Literary Review*, vol 8 nos 1-2, 1986, pp 88-95.

²⁸ Kate Soper, 'The Qualities of Simone de Beauvoir', *New Left Review*, 156 March-April 1986, pp 114-128.

²⁹ See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman and That Sex Which Is Not One*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1985.

³⁰ Andrew Parker, 'Mom', *Sexual Difference: Oxford Literary Review*, vol 8 nos 1-2, 1986, pp 96-104.

³¹ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1977, p 69.

³² Jane Gallop, 'Writing and Sexual Difference: The Difference Within', in Elizabeth Abel, *Writing and Sexual Difference*, University of Chicago, 1982, pp 283-290, and 'Annie Leclerc Writing a Letter, with Vermeer', *October* 33, Summer 1985, pp 103-118.

³³ Jacques Derrida, 'On Colleges and Philosophy', *ICA Documents* 5, London, Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986, p 71.

³⁴ Monique Plaza, 'Phallomorphic Power' and the Psychology of "Woman", *Ideology of Consciousness* Autumn 1978, no 4, pp 4-36.

Williamson also considers the Lacanian discourse of 'the subject in language' and 'sexual difference'. But unlike Plaza's critique of the negative feminine identity afforded by the linking of sexual difference and symbolisation, or Heath's worries about a Lacanian naturalisation of difference, Williamson argues that the subject in the sensory world of the imaginary cannot logically enter the symbolic by recognising a symbol. The Lacanian theory of subject formation, he maintains, relies upon an incompatible combination of conscious experience and unconscious signification, 'two discontinuous ideas of difference'.

Elsewhere in this issue, both the previously mentioned article by Jackie Stacey and Donald Greig's analysis of the critical construction of 'the Hitchcock text' consider a problem recently raised by Andrew Britton – that the 'difference' formulation eternalises women's oppression, which is then 'perpetually rediscovered . . . in the objects to which theory addresses itself'.³⁵ To disrupt this critical construction ('apologising for the results while offering a table of rhymes and repetitions as evidence'), Greig reviews Raymond Bellour's influential essays on Hitchcock. Through a parallel consideration of the way textual analysis itself operates an act of censorship, he examines Bellour's 'reduction' of the Hitchcock narrative to the male Oedipal scenario, not only at the expense of female Oedipality, but of the original fantasies, and 'primal scenes', enacted in films like *Rear Window*, *Psycho* and *Marnie*. Employing an important analysis developed by Elizabeth Cowie, Greig explores the multiplicity of positions afforded by such fantasies, and their disordering of sexual difference.

Two studies of recent films pursue this project of disordering difference. Stuart Cunningham and Ross Harley review Godard and Miéville's displacement of the genital phase into a chaotic anality, in their studies of family life. The mystery of where babies come from, that perennial primal question, is pondered again in *Hail Mary*: if there is, to borrow Lacan's phrase, 'no sexual relation' between a child's ostensible parents, who is responsible? The explanation offered in Matthew 1: 18-19 makes Western culture's most exalted female figure the mother, daughter and spouse of its major paternal principle. And this polymorphous union is not only sanctioned, it is sanctified. Not least, Cunningham and Harley maintain, by the film-makers themselves, whose reckless disregard for the progressivist principles once espoused by Godard permits them to explore all kinds of regression.

With *A Song of Ceylon* (not Basil Wright, 1934, but Laleen Jayamanne, 1985), the subject turns to hysteria. Must its ecstatic strivings be forever mapped onto the *woman's* body? A ritual exorcism in a working class suburb of Colombo resounds against a stately encounter of cinematic bodies – male, female and indeterminate. In Felicity Collins' reading 'the desire to dissolve the binary opposition of sexual difference is condensed into the figure of the transvestite', who appears in this film as a possessed priest, the goddess Kali and Kim Novak, among Others.

The issue concludes with a three-part treatment of the 1985 US and

³⁵ Andrew Britton, *Katharine Hepburn: The Thirties and After*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyneside Cinema, 1984, pp 41-42.

UK exhibition, *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality*. In her review of the show, Aimee Rankin returns to the problem of theory's own construction, and its conformism. Some of this work, she complains, displays more deference than difference, clinging to the parameters of the problematic and the prestige afforded by its own arcane retinue of references. Against this orthodoxy, she poses the polysemic image, evading (exceeding?) the anchors dangled by artists/critics/curators.

But in her afterword to the British show, Mary Kelly defends the exhibition as the work of a school, operating from a 'basis of shared ideas' against the modish pluralism of postmodernism. Another 'sameness' under consideration is the show's structuring absence, homosexuality, and the trouble it makes for the surprisingly stable opposites of 'difference'. In a provocative gloss on her current project, *Interim*, Kelly interrogates the sexual identity of the older woman. Having outgrown the only phase of acceptable feminine activity, maternity, should she turn her back on this identification, 'acknowledging, perhaps, that "being a woman" was only a brief moment in her life?' Should the masculinity complex be recuperated for the middle-aged woman? Would this breach the feminist identification with the mother which contributes to that pervasive fear of sameness, to the heterosexual imperative as the only alternative to Kristeva's abjection?

The final piece in this issue, a combination of text and photographs by Yve Lomax, could be seen as an attempt to stage the *Difference* show differently, as something other than what she calls 'the fabulous plotting of the same old same'. The photographs are from the sequence *Open Rings and Partial Lines* included in the original exhibition, the text from a pamphlet published by the artist. Unlike other of Lomax's writings, this critique of the sovereignty of sexual difference was not discussed in the exhibition catalogue. And certainly its refusal of a transcendental signifier ('one thing from which the difference originates'), the metaphoric coinage of the theory³⁶ and its implicit hierarchy would have undermined that confident display of *Difference*.

'More and no more difference' – Lomax's contradictory plea recalls a recent reconsideration of the politics of sexual difference: 'It could be that feminist objectives are not all of one order.' A linguistic theory of 'difference' – of meaning as produced through variation rather than inhering through resemblance – is one thing; that of an interest group attempting to declare its own specificity against an oppressive norm is another. Both have been important for feminism, if at times regrettably conflated. Neither, however, is geared to a third kind of anti-sexist campaigning, for equal rather than different treatment under the law. As Parveen Adams concludes in the final issue of a journal which took difference seriously enough to style its title after *S/Z*:

*in some case the objectives of feminist politics go against sexual differences, in some cases they do not, and the problem is to find out which is which.*³⁷

³⁶ 'Metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal' – Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense', in Mark C Taylor (ed), *Deconstruction in Context*, The University of Chicago Press, 1986, p 219.

³⁷ Parveen Adams and Elizabeth Cowie, 'Interview 1984', *m/f* nos 11/12, 1986, p 14.

LANGUAGE AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

BY DUGALD WILLIAMSON

THE THEORETICAL WORK of Lacan has been instrumental in linking structural linguistics with psychoanalysis to give an account of the formation of the human subject, including its construction in relations of sexual difference. Readers of *Screen* will be familiar with the influence which Lacanian theory has exercised in the attempts within film theory to provide a materialist view of subjectivity, which would solve problems associated with the formalism of semiotics and the functionalism of Marxist cultural analysis. They will recognise, too, its role in feminist theory concerned with the conditions of sexual representation, including pornography. The aim of this article is to demonstrate the problems of certain 'discursive figures', repeatable forms of reasoning, which organise the Lacanian theory and the objects it constructs, especially its version of 'the formation of the subject in language' and 'sexual difference'. It is these discursive figures or schemata which ground recent debates over biologism and phallogentrism in Lacan's work. This description of the coordinates of a theoretical field allows us to call into question the idea that, in the conjunction of psychoanalysis and linguistics, Lacanian theory 'discovers' an essential interrelation of subjectivity, sexuality and language.

'The Formation of the Subject in Language'

In Lacanian theory, the subject is seen not as the origin of thought and language that it is for an idealist tradition, but as an effect created of language. Further, the means of signification themselves are sexualised, the positions of male and female identity are associated with the constitutive processes of enunciation. To show the instability of the key metaphors of Lacanian discourse, we shall look first at the more

specifically linguistic terms, then at those concerned more extensively with sexual difference.

Lacan's speculation on the nature of the sign is well known:

To pinpoint the emergence of linguistic science we may say that... it is contained in the constitutive moment of an algorithm that is its foundation. This algorithm is the following:

$$\frac{S}{s}$$

which is read as: the signifier over the signified, 'over' corresponding to the bar separating the two stages.¹

Elaborating the model of Saussure in which elements are defined through their rule-governed relations within the language-system, Lacan says that the signifier and signified are 'distant orders separated initially by a barrier resisting signification' (this barrier being symbolised, of course, by the bar in the algorithm).² He argues that the signifier has its own principle of articulation, that is, it belongs to a realm of differential elements (phonemes) which combine according to 'the laws of a closed order' and thus form a signifying chain, 'rings of a necklace that is a ring in another necklace made of rings'.³ This articulation can be identified not only at the level of the phoneme but also at higher levels such as the sentence, where the signifier always anticipates meaning by spreading its own dimension before it, as when we wait all the more expectantly for the meaning of a sentence interrupted before a significant term: 'I shall never...'.⁴

This argument helps to debunk any assumption that the signifier exists just to represent the signified or to serve a meaning that somehow exists outside language in an ideal world of intention or spirit. The manner in which the signifier is capable of signification is located in 'an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier' where 'anchoring points' are possible.⁵ So for Lacan, it is in the chain of the signifier that meaning *insists*, but none of that chain's elements *consists* in the signification of which it is capable at any moment.⁶ Subject and signified tug at the sleeve of the signifier, as it were, but they remain effects of its dominion.⁷

Lacan connects the signifier and the types of figuration to which it lends itself, of course, with the theme of the unconscious.⁸ So, for instance, he links the categories of metaphor and metonymy to the principles of condensation and displacement used by Freud to describe the dreamwork and primary processes. Freud's more restricted view of the unconscious processes becomes generalised by Lacan as that unconsciousness, occurring for a subject, of the very process by which its own being is formed or changed in the defiles of the signifier. For instance, by linking the principle of metaphor to the Freudian idea of repression, Lacan argues that as the signifier of the sexual trauma is substituted by another term in the signifying chain there passes between them a spark whose significance is inaccessible at least initially to the conscious

¹ Jacques Lacan, 'The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud', in *Ecrits: A Selection*, London, Tavistock, 1977, p. 149.

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*, p. 152-153.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 153.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 154.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 153.

⁷ cf Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire Livre XX: Encore*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1975, p. 48, where the subject is defined as the intermediate effect of the movement between signifiers.

⁸ See especially part II of Jacques Lacan, 'The Agency of the Letter...', *op cit.*

⁹ *ibid*, p 166.

¹⁰ *ibid*, p 159.

¹¹ cf Colin MacCabe, 'Presentation of "The Imaginary Signifier"', *Screen* Summer 1975, vol 16 no 2, p 7.

¹² 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I', in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, *op cit*, pp 1-7.

subject.⁹ Similarly, the principle of significance of dreams as interpreted by Freud (the royal road to the unconscious) is said to be the linguistic structure in which the signifier is articulated.¹⁰ And, more generally than these instances, the unconscious is structured like a language, since the signifier marks the 'other scene', constituting the subject in a process which eludes awareness.

Such an argument is committed to relegating the Cartesian ego by de-centring the consciousness in relation to the unconscious. It is also meant to rescue the idea of the unconscious from the net of various empiricisms. In opposing both biological ideas of the body and 'its' needs as natural givens, and psychologistic ideas of the mind as the ego's authentic experience of itself, Lacan returns such categories as instinct, need and ego to the condition of language and its structuring of experience.¹¹

However, a problem may be registered here in terms which in no way reinstate empiricist methodology. The link between language and the unconscious in Lacanian theory is secured by an epistemological ploy, characteristic of structuralism more generally, whereby the structure is defined as an ideal form existing in a dialectical relation to the subject, who must realise the potential effects of the structure at the level of experience. An empiricist view of knowledge as guaranteed by the subject's immediate experience is retained, even though it is now relegated as a moment within a dialectic of structure and experience such that the subject is deprived of its constitutive status. The unconscious referred to by Lacan is simply the notion that the subject cannot *know* the conditions of his own historical act of speech, existing as they are supposed to beneath the limits of consciousness. The subject cannot know the pre-existing structure of language in the instance of speech since that structure is, by definition, what makes it possible for the subject to speak or know anything, including its imaginary identifications of itself as subject. We thus come to Lacan's reliance on the figure of misrecognition, the alleged failure of the subject to see the conditions which govern recognition and identity. In order to deal with this problem, it is necessary to discuss the imaginary/symbolic dialectic found in Lacan.

The Imaginary and the Symbolic

The imaginary/symbolic relation involves two interdependent features: an illusory identity of the subject, and a splitting of that identity through a recognition of difference which places the subject within linguistic and cultural patterning. This dialectic is closely associated with Lacan's account of the mirror phase.¹² In this account, the infant between the ages of six and eighteen months, still sunk in its motor incapacity and without language, recognises its reflected image which symbolises a possible unity of the body and a mental permanence of the *I*. However, ambiguity already sets in, for this first sense of coherent identity is

provided by an image which is detached from the child, an exterior counterpart: one might understand this as a split between the perceiving subject and the perceived image. Moreover, the unity is said to be usually experienced in the context of the mother's directing look, that is in relation to otherness. Nonetheless, this initial recognition is said to have a 'fictional' integrity which strikes deep, even while providing a model for all subsequent identifications across the exchanges of language.¹³ Jacqueline Rose points out that, for Lacan, 'the subject is constituted through language—the mirror image represents the moment when the subject is located in an order outside itself to which it will henceforth refer'.¹⁴ It is language, more decisively than the image, which provides the possibility of an identity yet fractures the subject. This is the fact of life in the symbolic; that the subject represents itself in language, but can do so only through the signifier which divisively passes it by in the avenues of speech.

In general, then, the terms imaginary and symbolic are understood not as standing alone, but as pre-supposing one another. Central to their relation is the idea of misrecognition, in which the imaginary recognition of identity is made possible only within a network of relations which subsume the subject and constitute its 'unconscious'. The extent to which these Lacanian terms have been taken up in film theory and some areas of feminism hardly needs to be underscored here. Instead of referring in detail to particular texts in these fields at this point, it might be useful to make three general comments about the imaginary/symbolic relation, together with the idea of subject-formation which it helps to generate and upon which such widespread reliance has been placed.¹⁵

First, the theory of the imaginary/symbolic dialectic has the form of a narrative and might have attracted more suspicion on this count than it has, given the teleological problems associated with that form. The story of a subject pre-destined to assume an identity through misrecognition in 'an ontological structure of the human world'¹⁶ glosses over a number of discontinuities, which will be analysed below.¹⁷

Secondly, it is worth noting that two incompatible ideas of lack and difference are often confused for the sake of the dialectic. One is the realist notion that the word could be experienced as a loss of the presence of the object named: the other is the idea that signifying elements necessarily enter relations of difference within a system. It is said that:

*Symbolisation starts... when the child gets its first sense that something could be missing; words stand for objects, because they have to be spoken at the moment when the first object is lost. For Lacan, the subject can only operate within language by constantly repeating that moment of fundamental and irreducible division. The subject is therefore constituted in language as this division or splitting (Freud's *Ichspaltung*, or *splitting of the ego*).¹⁸*

The cinematic image has been treated in similar fashion to the word, as the absence of the object experienced in the presence of the sign, most

¹³ As Rosalind Coward and John Ellis point out in *Language and Materialism*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, pp 110-111, this initial image of the ego's unity can take on new investments after entering the world of social difference and critical judgment.

¹⁴ Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds), *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, London, Macmillan, 1982, p 31.

¹⁵ To mention just a few of the texts in which Lacanian theory plays a significant role: Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, London, Macmillan, 1982; Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema*, London, Macmillan, 1981; Coward and Ellis, op cit; Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982; together with many of the articles which have appeared in *Screen*, *Camera Obscura*, etc.

¹⁶ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, op cit, pp 1-2.

¹⁷ It is sometimes observed that the imaginary/symbolic dialectic is a diachronic fable used to describe a synchronic relation, which is not completed once and for all, but persists as a continuous process of forming the subject. However, this qualification does not settle the issue of misrecognition. See

for example, Colin MacCabe, 'On Discourse', *Economy and Society*, vol 8 no 4, 1979, p 284.

¹⁸ Jacqueline Rose in Mitchell and Rose (eds), *op cit*, p 31.

strikingly perhaps in Christian Metz's 'The Imaginary Signifier'.¹⁹ Metz argues:

*in order to understand the film (at all), I must perceive the photographed object as absent, its photograph as present, and the presence of this absence as signifying.*²⁰

That the image is made present in a mode of absence is ostensibly a structural fact about how cinema signifies. This fact supposedly sets up the desire to see and (according to a similar principle in relation to auditory mechanisms) the desire to hear, both of which depend on a 'lack' that is made intensely present or 'concrete' in the cinematic signifier as it is given to consciousness. This lack links cinema to the pursuit of the absent object, in an imaginary which must be re-theorised from the side of the symbolic.²¹

One should note that the argument depends here on setting the signifier in relation to the referent (shades of the conflation of signified and referent in early cine-semiotics, but now in order to point up the imaginary and conditional nature of realism). And it is a little surprising, perhaps, that the relation of object and image or object and word can be used to adduce evidence for, on the one hand, the subject's anticipation of signifying difference and, on the other, the subject's belief in the imaginary. This is explicable by the fact that such arguments retain the problematic concept of language as representation and hence the variants which it is possible to play upon it. Once that concept is preserved, it can be used to argue either that the word (or image) represents the object in a unifying relation, as in the imaginary identity of self, word and world; or that it creates a loss experienced in the gap across which it makes absent an object which is presumed once to have been immediately present to consciousness. To argue that the subject actually experiences language as a formative loss suffered in the strait between words and things allows a pun on the Freudian notion of the lost object and its drama of desire and repetition. Yet this argument begs the question, since it succeeds only as long as one takes for granted the realist idea of language as representation or as failed representation. The problem with retaining this concept is, of course, that signs are assumed to have the single, essential function of reflecting the object to the subject; while no criteria are provided for how either the object or its representation are rendered intelligible, other than an idealist assumption of cognitive powers natural to consciousness. In which case, the empiricist concept of representation can have nothing to do with the definition of the sign in structural linguistics (its own realist moments aside), and should not be used to designate some supposed anticipation of the symbolic order.

This realist idea is incompatible with the idea of language as a system of phonematic and grammatical differences since the latter does not require the signifier to be thought of as a representation of the referent, nor as an empirical element whose relation to an object could be the

¹⁹ *Screen Summer* 1975, vol 16 no 2, pp 14-76.

²⁰ *ibid*, p 58.

²¹ *ibid*, pp 59-61 and 14-18.

content of an independent perception in the mind. In this linguistic framework, the signifier is defined by the action of the rules or codes governing the relations of elements in a system, and this definition can work perfectly well without setting the system in any relation to 'consciousness'. Lacanian theory has, however, allowed the different definitions of language to run together, in order to support its ideas of subject-formation, as for example when it is assumed that the experience of the word/object relation provides either the anticipation of a signifying loss or an experience of difference that is analogous to, and even acts as the motor of, linguistic signification:

*given that each word in a language gains its value (its meaning) from the set of differences in which it is caught, it follows that for language to be set in motion there are a necessary set of absences at its heart – a necessary tearing of the word from the world so that the object can only appear there where its identify has been transformed into difference – where it can find a name. Similarly, for the speaking subject there is an absence there where he speaks....*²²

The conflation of two incompatible ideas of difference – the linguistic definition of relations between elements in a system, and the realist notion of the referential loss in language – thus marks one of the conditions under which the peculiar figure of the formation of the subject in language is produced.

Thirdly, even when the old empiricist chestnut of representation is not re-introduced into the definition of language, Lacan will not allow his view of language-as-system to stand simply as the work of a particular theoretical model, whose own techniques and rules (of combination, substitution, etc) determine what *counts* as linguistic organisation for certain purposes (these techniques and purposes being different from those found in other linguistic models such as Chomsky's generative grammar). On the contrary, it is assumed that the theoretical model embodies a structure which operates in relation to consciousness and which thus provides a necessary drama of misrecognition in the subject's entry into language. This point can be taken further by discussing the psychoanalytic metaphors relating specifically to sexual difference.

'The Recognition of Difference'

Like the Freudian castration complex, Lacan's use of the term 'phallus' to describe the ordering of sexual difference has been a contentious issue in psychoanalysis and feminism. Some writers have seen Lacan's theory as continuing a phallographic tradition in which 'woman' does not have her own positive definition, but is seen negatively from the male position as that which is different from it: she is assumed to exist in the singular, to lack something, as in the Freudian idea of penis envy, and to be important primarily in the way she poses a threat to male sexuality that

²² Colin MacCabe, 'Presentation of "The Imaginary Signifier"', *op cit*, p. 10. In relation to the general issue at stake here, Foucault argues that structuralism depends on a particular conception of the subject of consciousness. The subject retreats behind the linguistic mechanism of which it is the limited construct, only to return in the form of an experience necessary to set the machine of language in motion (cf the theme of misrecognition and the imaginary). See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, New York, Vintage Books, 1973, especially chapters 8 and 9.

²³ For example, Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1985.

²⁴ For discussions of this, see Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds), *op cit*; Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1982; Stephen Heath, 'Difference', *Screen* Autumn 1978, vol 19 no 3, pp 51-112.

²⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, *op cit*, pp 286-287.

²⁶ Stephen Heath, 'Difference', *Screen* Autumn 1978, vol 19 no 3, p 63.

²⁷ Jacqueline Rose, 'Introduction - II' in Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds), *op cit*, pp 27-57.

²⁸ Jacques Lacan, 'Seminar of 21 January 1975' in Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds), *op cit*, p 165.

²⁹ *ibid*, p 56: 'For Lacan, to say that difference is "phallic" difference is to expose the symbolic and arbitrary nature of its division as such'.

³⁰ Heath, 'Difference', *op cit*, pp 51-112. On this point, see especially part I, including the reference (p 53) to Freud's assumption that the girl's 'deficiency' is discovered by seeing

must in turn be disavowed. Luce Irigaray, for example, has proposed an alternative to the Lacanian idea of signification, an idea of the feminine as plural, fluid and impossible to define as an effect of the phallic order.²³ In general, the main contention has occurred over whether Lacan allows the system of signification to appear under the limits set by a term which is ultimately the definition of the male.²⁴

In defence of Lacan, it is said that in his return to Freud he shows that sexuality and sexual difference are never natural givens, but are effects constructed in signification and cultural relations. So, for example, it is argued that 'need' is mediated through 'desire' which links the subject to the Other, the serialised absence and presence of signifying processes.²⁵ This idea applies not only to the infant but to love and sexual relations more generally: as Stephen Heath remarks, in relation to the unconscious there is no sexual relation as such, one subject complementing another, but rather a movement of desire through the signifier.²⁶

Along similar lines, Rose states that the phallus is privileged only because it is the mark of a symbolic ordering of sexual difference which is never the realisation of a biological or psychological essence.²⁷ For Lacan, 'there is nothing in the unconscious which accords with the body'.²⁸ Hence it is important not to confuse the phallus with the penis: the former marks the fact of symbolic differentiation through which the subject is constructed, and which undercuts even the most secure recognitions of male or female identity. Rose adds that Lacan is questioning exactly that consistency of difference whereby the feminine is catalogued as other, with reference to difference in the body as something given in nature.²⁹

Heath, too, accepts these claims but argues that Lacan does in fact lapse into biologism, and that consequently he naturalises a phallic or patriarchal bias in the process of signification itself, and hence in sexual representations at the very level of form. Heath argues that the notion of the phallus as mark of the symbolic construction of subjectivity is allowed to coincide with a vision of sexual difference as given, apparently, in nature, thus reducing sexuality to genitality.³⁰ A circle thus develops: to see sexual difference is to know its meaning, which confirms the phallus as that which the male has and the female lacks: in turn, a whole ideological representation of difference can thus be guaranteed by 'the way things are'. Belief in some natural reality of sexuality thus threatens to undermine the idea that subjectivity is symbolically organised. 'Woman', although supposedly equal with 'man', is defined again as mere alterity, missing out on the phallus and missing in the discourse it organises.³¹ It is only in this way that the phallus can appear as 'the logical copula'³², as the self-evident symbol for sexual difference. This fixation is measured, by Heath, against the historically open transformations in the unconscious.³³ For Heath, it is necessary to return constantly to the symbolic, the unconscious, as a process of *producing* differences, and so resist the danger of accepting that difference which is already *produced*, accepted, which closes the signifier

on the signified, and is justified by mythic reference to the phallic norm as natural.³⁴

Now, while it is true that Lacan has recourse to an idea of seeing and knowing difference in the body, this problem is not solved by referring to the symbolic as the site of a genuine articulation of subjectivity and difference, that is irreducible to phallic bias. Within the framework which we are analysing, to force the subject to retreat to the mediations of the symbolic structure is already a means of inviting it to return yet again, as that which experiences the effects of that structure in the imaginary. The problem which Heath identifies in Lacan's biologism is only an element in a much wider deployment of discursive figures, including the symbolic, where the idea of consciousness is retained in order to argue that the subject is formed in division. It is a different kind of criticism from those just summarised, therefore, to say that, as an instance of this retention, the Lacanian theory *has* to refer to the phallus as both signifier and object (organ), and that what is problematic is the configuration into which these two kinds of reference are moulded. To elucidate this point, we return to Lacan's text, 'The Signification of the Phallus'.³⁵

Here we find that the phallus does, indeed, have the function of a signifier, so that from this point of view it is not the penis: the meaning of the latter could only ever be articulated through the principle of symbolisation like any other signified. The phallus marks the two inter-related kinds of symbolic regulation: the linguistic structure of the unconscious, and the Oedipal complex understood at the structuring of subjectivity. So, for example, the imaginary unity of the mother/child dyad is broken by the father, who functions not as a referent but as a signifier, relating to the law of the formation of the subject in difference, so that the male definition of sexualities is not natural, merely normative.³⁶ But in relation to both kinds of regulation, a major problem arises. How does the subject, defined initially in the imaginary, 'recognise' difference? (Without such recognition, the subject cannot enter the symbolic, which in turn has no historical realisation or effect.) Arguably, the phallus (difference) is not something which a subject can 'see' or 'recognise' at all, and this applies not only to Lacan's speculation about 'vision' but also to the category of the symbolic which Lacan's critics continue to employ as the key to subjectivity.

As already seen, recognition of the phallus is not something which can be given in a pure experience of the body, the whole attempt being to resist ideas of nature, instinct, need, as points of origin and to see them as signifieds organised through the signifier.³⁷ However, the Lacanian theory only works by assuming that the systemic difference which effects the subject is acceded to by an empirical perception of difference: no structural consequence of language or of the castration complex can take effect unless there occurs in the subject a 'moment of experience' of difference.³⁸

The recognition of difference is actually quite difficult to pin down in

the penis.

³¹ *ibid*, p 59.

³² Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, *op cit*, p 287.

³³ Stephen Heath, 'Difference', *op cit*, p 74 and elsewhere.

³⁴ *ibid*, p 108.

³⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, *op cit*, pp 281-291.

³⁶ cf Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds), *op cit*, p 39 and 69.

³⁷ cf Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, *op cit*, pp 285-286.

³⁸ For this and the phrases quoted in the next paragraph, see *ibid*, pp 287-289.

Lacan's account. On the one hand, the phallus as signifier is what governs the field of the signified, articulating desire and subjectivity at the level of language. Lacan can detach himself from any notion that the phallus is empirically knowable as 'the most tangible element in the real of sexual copulation', or as a natural equivalent to the already mentioned 'logical copula' of difference, since such locutions conceal the fact that the role of the phallus is 'veiled'. On the other hand, in order to argue that the function of the signifier is hidden from the subject of the imaginary, Lacan must retain the idea of the subject of consciousness. His claim that the role of the phallus is veiled is thus merely a variant on the structuralist theme of misrecognition which we are analysing. Now, the experience of difference can be identified with the subject's perception of anatomical difference, even if this perception is not constitutive of the subject. But there is no overriding reason for Lacan to define the experience of difference in this particular way. So, for instance, he can define it as the point at which the subject recognises that its own imaginary investment in the mother as having the phallus must fail, since the phallus as signifier in the field of the Other inevitably brings division to any subject and relation.³⁹

The key point to make here is that effects of difference in the signifier must be registered as an empirical event in the consciousness. The figure of subject-formation thus operates strategically by keeping the idea of consciousness as the site of immediate recognition of difference, allegedly in a form coinciding with difference in the signifier. At the same time, the latter, since it is also construed as a purely logical relation, can be said to evade the grasp of consciousness and so comprise its unconscious. The conflation of two discontinuous ideas of difference is thus found at the heart of the figure of subject-constitution in the symbolic.

'Difference' at the level of the signifier in fact can be treated as a quite limited effect of a particular linguistic model. It can be identified with methods of establishing differential couplings (for example, making the distinction between voiced and unvoiced phonemes), or more generally with the processes of identifying paradigmatic relations between elements that can be drawn into syntagmatic articulations according to certain codes, such as rules of word-order in a language (or analogously for cinema, rules of editing). The phallus, in the sense of the system of the signifier, is not something one can happen to 'see' or fail to see, because it is simply the name rather imaginatively given to what ought to be treated as the action of a limited set of rules or conventions, by means of which one defines elements in oppositional relations such that they can be articulated. That is, the signifier is something which one 'recognises' only when one activates the discursive rules or techniques of the linguistic model in which it is constituted, and it ought not to be thought of as given to (or withheld from) consciousness independently of the circulation and use of those rules. The signifying chain is 'interminable' only in the sense that one continues to repeat particular procedures of linguistic patterning.

Moreover, in Lacan's account of the imaginary and symbolic, if a subject is said to *experience* difference (for example, the presence or absence of an object, its identity with or separateness from the subject), then it is still situated in the imaginary, precisely because the *form* of difference here is an event of meaning given to consciousness. And at that point, the only criterion offered for the recognition of presence and absence, identity and difference, is the sensationalist one of experience and its mysterious intelligibility in the mind. The idea of an interplay of imaginary and symbolic can thus be seen to break down.⁴⁰

The Oedipal and cultural inflection of the symbolic is similarly predicated on this *play on the word* 'difference'. The phallus recognised cannot be the system of differential relations, since this is taken as the principle which *organises* subject-positions and the ideas of identity which it is possible to have. Such a principle is not something one could see as present or absent in the body: it is a condition of perception rather than the content of an individual perception. To say that the subject in the imaginary recognises the phallus must therefore mean that he or she *perceives* the possibility that the body could be different, in a way that somehow allows the passage into the symbolic. But merely to see genital difference tells one nothing about those conditions of symbolic ordering which construct representations of the body. Either the subject is already in the symbolic, cultural ordering, or it must be assumed that such ordering coincides with a pre-discursive capacity to experience difference in a form which is appropriate to all subsequent codings. Again, in the latter case, the empiricist appeal to experience means the subject is still construed as being in the imaginary.

These remarks indicate that the Lacanian schema of subject-formation is ultimately incoherent. It may also be noted that the use of this schema does not solve the type of problems which Paul Hirst has identified in an adjacent area, namely Althusser's theory of subjectivity and ideology.⁴¹ Hirst has demonstrated the contradictions involved in the idea that the individual, who is not yet a subject, is formed as a subject for a social structure through a process of hailing and recognition. It will be remembered that, for Althusser, this process is a dual mirror-relation in which the individual sees and identifies with that image of itself as subject which the structure provides. But how can it identify with that image unless it already has the capacity for recognition appropriate to its existence as subject? This capacity is simply assumed, independently of any determinate means of recognition which are supposed to constitute subjectivity. The idea of interpellation retains an empiricist conception of recognition as the universally given capacity of the subject to know self-evident objects through experience. This assumed process of recognition is now treated, however, as one in which the subject fails to see that the obviousness of its knowledge of the world has been made possible by its interpellation within the structure. The subject thus imagines itself to be the origin of its own modes of action and speech, and is blind to the fact that it has already been constituted for this apparently constitutive role. Through this imaginary relation to its real

⁴⁰ A further example of the conflation of experiential and linguistic difference is provided by Lacan's reference to the *fort/da* game described by Freud. See Lacan, *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1981, p 39, and cf Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *op cit*, pp 104-105.

⁴¹ Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in *Lenin and Philosophy*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1971; Paul Q Hirst, *On Law and Ideology*, London, Macmillan, 1979, chapter 3. For a different view on the relation of Lacan to Althusser, see Stephen Heath, 'The Turn of the Subject', *Cine-Tracts*, vol 2 nos 3/4, 1979, pp 32-48.

conditions of existence, that is, through ideology, the subject thus comes to support the structure in which it is interpellated. The idea of misrecognition thus requires Althusser to posit the subject of consciousness whose formation is supposedly being explained. The Lacanian theory of the imaginary/symbolic relation, although problematising the unity of the ego which Althusser appears to accept, only compounds these problems: it continues to posit the subject of consciousness who is caught up in a relation of misrecognition, a relation now located in a continuous play of the signifier and necessary lack in being, or desire.

A Summary of Strategies in Lacanian Theory

Misrecognition is that assumed process in which knowledge of the conditions of representation is withheld from consciousness.⁴² In relation to this problem in Lacan, it may be useful to expand on our comments about his conflation of two distinct concepts of language.

On the one hand, as indicated above, the hypothesis is retained, in a kind of theoretical chess-move, that language could transparently show the world to the mind. The definition of the imaginary depends on the idea of representation to evoke a provisional unity of the world and word, and on the idea of expression to suggest an apparent unity of self and word. On the other hand, language is defined in terms of a grammar, or set of codes which determine the formation of utterances. The system of language here can be treated as a material ensemble of techniques and conventions which *produce* particular effects of meaning and recognition, and which need not be construed as existing in relation to a subject who somehow experiences meaning autonomously, or realises the effects of an ideal structure in an indeterminate moment of experience.

Only within the first-mentioned of these conceptions is it possible to think of language as expressing consciousness and representing the world to the subject, or as failing to do these things. In the second (systemic) conception, what counts as linguistic organisation is determined by a set of grammatical and conventional relations. It is only by continually blurring these opposed concepts of language, and consequently treating the systemic relations as a point where subject and language fail to have an integrally expressive relation, and where the subject fails to know what it is that organises its experience, that one can conjure up the figure of the subject's formation in language through misrecognition. Given this strategy of argument, it then appears that, in the real, something called the subject undergoes a constant experience of division and formation, Lacan's 'essential vacillation'⁴³ between a wanting-to-be in language and a loss experienced because the subject can only ever come into being through the system of the signifier which already divides it. This view shows the wishful thinking of a rationalism, which assumes that the theoretical model it builds comprises an ontological structure which must find its realisation in history. What should be displaced by a materialist view of language as a set of techniques which

⁴² cf Colin MacCabe, 'Presentation of "The Imaginary Signifier"', op cit, p 11: 'The introduction of the symbolic allows language to function as the grasping of opposition and difference. But this recognition can never exist at the moment of speaking (else how could we say anything?).'

⁴³ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, London, Hogarth Press, 1977, p 83.

produces effects of meaning, is not consciousness (giving way to a logic of desire based on lack), but the *concept* of consciousness, in which case there would be no question of the capacity or failure of the subject to know the structure of the signifier.

The psychoanalytic theory discussed here draws support from a form of reasoning that is associated more generally with phenomenological interventions in linguistics, such as those made by Benveniste and Ricoeur. Very broadly, the interest of such phenomenological writings is in how to understand the dynamics of subjectivity in relation to linguistics, which seems to construct language as the self-contained object of a science. In the work of the writers just referred to⁴⁴, a reality of language is defined in terms which go beyond either an idealism of the subject or a formalism of linguistic structures. Subject and structure are seen not as independently existing categories to be set in a dualistic exchange, but as mutually constitutive terms, whose genuinely dialectical relation gives rise to a sense of language and subjectivity as process. The linguistic system is realised, its abstract signifying potential is moved towards meaning and reference, through the act in which a subject draws upon it to speak. At the same time, however, this subject who realises the possibilities held in the system is not a pre-defined entity for whom language would merely be an instrument of communication. On the contrary, the subject is formed by bringing into play the co-ordinates of the sign; it is to be understood precisely as a speaking subject.

To illustrate this, we may cite Benveniste's contrast between 'language' as the formal system whose terms await realisation, and 'discourse' as an instance in which the subject is constituted by using language:

*Language is... the possibility of subjectivity because it always contains the linguistic forms appropriate to the expression of subjectivity, and discourse provokes the emergence of subjectivity because it consists of discrete instances. In some way language puts forth 'empty' forms which each speaker, in the exercise of discourse, appropriates to himself and which he relates to his 'person', at the same time defining himself as I and a partner as you. The instance of discourse is thus constitutive of all the coordinates that define the subject...*⁴⁵

The subject thus fills the empty forms of language, but its relations as subject arise within the forms of speaking which are mobilised. '“Ego” is he who says “ego”'.⁴⁶ For Benveniste, enunciation is the process of making a statement, which is irreducible to the grammatical form of the statement made. To take the important case of the first person: the *I* who speaks is not the same as the subject referred to in the utterance (as seen in the famous paradox, 'I am lying'). The value of the pronoun is not given by the system alone, but nor does the individuality of *I* stem from some prior being ('How could the same term refer indifferently to any individual whatsoever and still at the same time identify him in his individuality?'⁴⁷). The first person, because it is without a fixed signified, is suited to use by different individuals: through its function we see that

⁴⁴ See, for example, 'Structure, Word, Event' in C Reagan and D Stewart (eds), *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1978, pp 109-119; and Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, Coral Gables, California, University of Miami Press, 1971, especially chapters 18-22, although not all Benveniste's work is reducible to the philosophical argument identified here.

⁴⁵ Emile Benveniste, *op cit*, p 227.

⁴⁶ *ibid*, p 224.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p 226.

⁴⁸ Of course, not all language-use is referred to as 'discourse' by Benveniste, since some statements (in the mode of '*histoire*' or story) allegedly fail to show their own enunciation, but this does not affect the main argument here.

⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, op cit, chapter 9: these citations from pp. 320-322.

⁵⁰ Emile Benveniste, op cit, pp 224-225.

⁵¹ *ibid*, p 224.

language comes to signify, but on the condition that the speaker refer each time to the instance of discourse in which he or she is constructed by saying *I*. This exemplifies the way that the subject is constituted by performing the possibilities contained in the structure of language which, through that performance, finds its reason to be.⁴⁸

Lacan's writings repeat the theme that structure and subject can be understood only through an interplay which constitutes a further dialectical term, the formation of the subject in language, now treating the latter not as a positive guarantee of being (as it may appear for a Benveniste), but as an experience of division and lack. So, for example, the relation of enunciation and enounced is experienced as a splitting: I can become a subject only by saying *I*, but this very term is not 'mine', since it belongs to the signifying chain and refers to its articulation of differential elements, including the *you*, *he* or *she*, in structuring relations of which the one who speaks is but a passing effect. Thus, instead of the plenitude and unity of Benveniste's 'instance of discourse', there is disunity, a lacuna in the very process of coming into being, referred to as desire, and through which the structural Other is itself realised in history without ever being reduced to particular instances of experience. Once again, this kind of account relies on our supposing that the linguistic terms, in this case pronouns, are not simply conventional signs of identity, but that (as with Benveniste) they must come into an existential relation with consciousness and be invested with the real presence of the subject in time and space, or (as with Lacan) that they mark the displacement of the consciousness which hypothetically might have appeared in its own right there where it cannot, in the structure which founds it.

In either of its variants, this kind of argument reproduces what Foucault has referred to as the transcendental/empirical couple by means of which the modern figure of the subject ('man') is constructed. This is the figure in which subjectivity and knowledge are formed within certain empirical mechanisms (life, labour and language), whose perceived historical limits give rise to an attempt in the human sciences to make them stand also for the transcendental conditions of subjectivity. 'Man' can no longer 'posit himself in the immediate and sovereign transparency of a *cogito*': instead, the image of transcendental subjectivity is recovered by bringing out the value of the empirical determinations at the level of experience which in turn makes their functioning possible.⁴⁹

To make the connection here, let us pursue Benveniste's idea of 'address'. According to his account, I posit myself as subject only by saying *I* in relation to a *you*, who in turn may become an *I* to my *you*. To become a subject is to be inducted into the purely empirical, pronominal play of differences. This situation of address marks the emergence of a fundamental property of language in being, and language provides the very definition of subjectivity.⁵⁰ This subjectivity is not defined by a feeling one experiences of being oneself, which is subsequently expressed in language.⁵¹ On the other hand, this grammatical precondition relies on the subject's experience of identity in and through

language. In this sense, linguistics, while describing language as an empirical mechanism, begins to recover a knowledge of language as a transcendental staging of the possibility and forms of subjectivity. The basis of subjectivity may be 'determined by the linguistic status of person', yet 'language is possible because each speaker sets himself up as a *subject* by referring to himself as *I* in his discourse'.⁵² Even though the relations of 'person' are linguistically founded, the *I* 'must be established in the individual's own consciousness in order to become accessible to that of the fellow human being'.⁵³ Hence, grammatical person is itself defined in relation to the individual, who experiences itself as a distinct entity through relations of difference from others, in the forms of exchange which are already appropriate to that experience. As seen in the quotation already given, language is, for Benveniste, 'the possibility of subjectivity' because it contains the forms already geared 'to the expression of subjectivity'⁵⁴ (my emphasis). Such a definition thus assumes that the individual already has the capacity to experience that identity to which language will come to refer.

Our earlier discussion should indicate that for Lacan, too, language is a transcendental *mise-en-scène*. The system of the signifier is that which makes possible the emergence of the subject. At the same time, as we have seen, the idea of the experiencing subject is retained in order to give the point of realisation of possibilities held in the system, with which the subject must always remain in a relation of misrecognition, marking (in contrast to Benveniste) the non-being in existence.⁵⁵ The interplay of the transcendental and empirical subject is a figure inscribed firmly in the Lacanian metaphors of subject-formation which we have discussed.

Conclusion

Some problems in using Lacanian theory to analyse cinema and other cultural practices may be noted briefly. This model tends to reduce diverse representational practices to the single mechanism of psycho-analytic subject-formation through misrecognition. Different kinds of mental and bodily capacities (for instance, in relation to reading and acting), which individuals may acquire within particular cultural relations, organisations of knowledge, uses of representational techniques and technologies, tend to be seen as manifestations of this essential structure of subjectivity.⁵⁶ The focus on the relation of subject and signifier also arguably assigns too narrow a logic, on the basis of linguistic ordering, to the various styles of discursive and institutional practice which are encountered in a medium like film (with its uses of textual and cultural modes of constructing character, narrative, trainings in editing or acting, relations of dissemination etc). Moreover, the teleological view of subject-formation makes it appear (in a very un-Brechtian way) that the effects produced by some particular use of representational techniques, such as point-of-view editing, are necessary

⁵² *ibid*, p 225.

⁵³ *ibid*.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p 227.

⁵⁵ cf Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire Livre XX*, op cit, p 35.

⁵⁶ The topic of differential social formations of human attributes is explored in Paul Hirst and Penny Woolley, *Social Relations and Human Attributes*, London, Tavistock, 1982, for example chapter 3.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Stephen Heath, 'Narrative Space', *Screen* Autumn 1976, vol 17 no 3, pp 68-112.

⁵⁸ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* Autumn 1975, vol 16 no 3, pp 6-18.

⁵⁹ Stephen Heath, *The Sexual Fix*, London, Macmillan, 1982.

⁶⁰ cf Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, New York, Vintage Books, 1980, especially Part 4, chapters 3 and 4.

outcomes, since they are what is required to secure the subject's misrecognition, in its imaginary relation to the signifying order.

A corollary of the semiotic-psychoanalytic account has been a critique of realism in the cinema, as the concealment of the process by which sense is constructed: a critique which tends to lead into a utopian vote for the return of the repressed, another 'space', the irruption of the signifying chain whose infinite possibilities of *écriture* have been suppressed for the safety of some dominant signified.⁵⁷ This principle of excess may be brought to coincide with the oppositions of male and female. One finds this in a wide range of texts: from the kind of account represented in Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'⁵⁸, according to which cinematic representation embodies mechanisms of male voyeurism and fetishism, which seek to deny the threat of difference and potential excess posed by the woman as other; through familiar notions of feminine writing as closer than masculine writing to the body, as fluid and transgressive; to a style of argument found in Heath's *The Sexual Fix*⁵⁹, in favour of transcending the normative 'fixing' of identities in representation, a possibility to be achieved by means of a continual, progressive movement *between* polarities, for a truth of subjectivity which it is still the privilege of supposedly repressed sexuality to promise.

The general aim here has not been to dismiss Lacanian and related theoretical work as total error, but to indicate a number of problems within it which have not been adequately acknowledged, and which might give reason to change some of its terms into less global and more flexible currency. So, for example, one might detach the idea of the effectivity of representational, discursive means in organising particular forms of recognition, from the epistemological theory of subject-formation which it is made to underpin. Similarly, the totalising categories of subject and linguistic structure used in the particular mode of analysis which we have discussed, can clearly be disaggregated into various historical constructions of the person (including the sexual person and definitions of gender), techniques of individualisation, organisations of conduct, modes of language-training and so on.

Some criticisms of psychoanalytic theory imply that it could be explained away as the mere 'reflection' of immediate, sociological determinations and interests. Without accepting such reductionism, or implying that historical and psychoanalytic modes of analysis are mutually exclusive, it might be possible to reflect further on the paradigms of sexuality which are used in the account of subject-formation which we have considered. Arguably, in its use of the castration complex and the idea of the phallus as the mark of signification, this account essentialises certain elements of a sexual characterology formed in a particular nexus of sexual medicine and sexology (including the late nineteenth century character-types which Foucault describes in *The History of Sexuality*: the impotent male, the nervous female identified with a sexuality that might be dangerous, and so on).⁶⁰

From one point of view, it seems curious that the idea of difference in the *signifier* should be associated with possibilities of sexual difference, whose recognition marks the division endlessly played out within the subject's own being. This has not always seemed a self-evident connection to make between linguistics and knowledges of sexuality. It is as if the current epistemological figure of the subject/language relation were simply able to fall in with character-types and sexualisations of the body which circulated in earlier discourses, and rework them for a radical ontology of the subject. An example might be the conception of bisexuality used by Freud to indicate a stage in the genesis of the subject through polymorphous perverse possibilities towards 'normal' adult sexuality. In some current writing, a notion of bisexuality has been invested with a new (or greatly altered) potential, where it can give sexual content to a residually Romantic notion that true subjectivity is to be found in the incompleteness of the self, the active tension between thought and feeling, mental consciousness and pulsional experience, and indeed, between the masculine closure of representation and the feminine possibility of excess. In this case, it becomes possible to speak in the same breath of a plethora of unrealised differences for the subject positioned in the signifying process, and an oscillation between sexual polarities, not bisexuality in any fixated form, but a continual, androgynous deferral of identity, the intermediate space of desire: these two terms coming together to create a sense of the radical possibilities of the subject's realisation in history.⁶¹ However, historical speculations concerning the relations between subjectivity, discourse and regulations of sexuality obviously go well beyond the scope of this article.⁶² The main purpose here has been to counsel a divorce for the Lacanian marriage of psychoanalysis and linguistics which, despite the blessings of Saint Theresa⁶³, was not made in heaven.

⁶¹ See, for example, arguments mounted in Stephen Heath, 'Difference', *op cit*, and *The Sexual Fix*, *op cit*.

⁶² One area of historical relations, the encounter between literature, sexuality and obscenity law, is the subject of a forthcoming book, co-authored with Ian Hunter and David Saunders, provisionally entitled *On Pornography: Literature, Sexuality and the Law* (Macmillan).

⁶³ Lacan's *Séminaire XX* discusses Bernini's *The Ecstasy of Saint Theresa* as a representation of 'the *jouissance* of the woman' and it is illustrated on the cover.

This article is based on a section of my PhD thesis, *Reconsidering Film Theory*, Griffith University, Brisbane, 1983. I would like to thank Ian Hunter, Jeffrey Minson, David Saunders and Beverley Brown for many discussions and for extensive comments on drafts. Responsibility for any problems in the article is, of course, my own.

THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS
DEPARTMENT OF FINE ART
M.A. Course in the Social History of Art
University Session 1987-88

Applications are invited for a one calendar year full-time M.A. course in the Social History of Art. The course's main component is a series of seminars and lectures on the problems of theory and method in the construction of a social historical account of artistic production. Students also study a specific period or topic in art history in which they are encouraged to test out theoretical issues and procedures. In addition, students will produce a 10,000 word dissertation.

Applicants should normally hold a good honours degree, and candidates are eligible to apply for B.A. Studentships. Further particulars and application forms are available from the M.A. Admissions Tutor, Department of Fine Art, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT.

The Films of Werner Herzog

Between mirage and history

Edited by **TIMOTHY CORRIGAN**

Visually and philosophically ambitious and at the same time provocatively eccentric, Herzog's films have been greeted equally by extreme adulation and extreme condemnation. The book is an attempt to illuminate these contradictions.

248 pages Hardback 0 416 41060 X £15.50 Paperback 0 416 41070 7 £7.95

Social Communication in Advertising

Persons, products, and images of well-being

WILLIAM LEISS, STEPHEN KLINE and SUT JHALLY

This is the first genuinely comprehensive study of advertising in Western society and culture. Using more than sixty illustrations the authors review the debate about advertising which has occurred throughout this century, presenting a balanced account of the attacks on advertising and the defences for it.

340 pages Illustrated Paperback 0 416 01201 9 £9.95



METHUEN

11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

**CAMERA
WORK**

121 ROMAN ROAD
BETHNAL GREEN
LONDON E2 0QN

**CAMERA
WORK**



March 11-28

Open Submission Exhibition.

For application forms and further details send S.A.E.

Submission deadlines: 2D photographic—28 February

3D/performance proposals—14 February

TELEPHONE • 01 980 6256

THE SEXUAL DIFFERENTIATION OF THE HITCHCOCK TEXT

BY DONALD GREIG

¹ Roland Barthes,
'Theory of the Text',
in Robert Young (ed),
Untying the Text,
London, Routledge
and Kegan Paul, 1981.

It is part of the theory of the Text to plunge any enunciation, including its own, into crisis. — Roland Barthes¹

MUCH TEXTUAL ANALYSIS in the '70s, most notably that of Raymond Bellour, proposed and demonstrated a model of the classical Hollywood cinema in which sexual difference occupied a central position. Sexual difference served as both the problematic of the text, inaugurating narrative through its introduction of difference to the stability of repetition, and as the final goal of the text, its resolution and negation of that difference through, more often than not, the establishment of the heterosexual couple. Within this model the figure of the woman functioned as the term of difference, the crucial pivot for both text and analysis; inversely, the desire of the man, a masculine desire, constituted the enunciation of the film. The correlative to this model was the spectator, the unwitting final resting place of this textual activity, marshalled *for* this enunciation by the film text, desired by the text in order to desire like the text. And throughout this process, pursuing a parallel enunciation, distanced through the text of critical activity, was the (male) critic, apologising for the results while offering a table of rhymes and repetitions as evidence.

It is only recently that this methodology has come to be questioned, most notably in recent feminist work around the notion of fantasy. While accepting the demonstration of certain formal characteristics of classical editing (alternation, repetition-resolution, etc) and noting ideology's appropriation of such textual effects for its own ends, it is specifically the political value of the critical repetition of the workings of patriarchy that

has been foregrounded. Textual analysis may well demonstrate the *tendency* of the text, may well trace the dominant obsessions of the text and its efforts to implicate the spectator in a male Oedipal itinerary but, as Barthes and others have been at pains to show, the fluidity and contradictoriness of the text makes any unified reading open to question. Work on fantasy has allied itself with this approach in its stress upon the interchangeability of roles, for spectator and character, *across* the terms of sexual difference—the possibility for the spectator, ultimately, of positions, rather than the one (male) subject position that the text seems to favour. This is to assert not only multiple entries into the text, but also multiple identities within the text.

It is through the films of Alfred Hitchcock, and readings of those films, that I wish to confront the issues of sexual difference within the Hollywood machine, and to question sexual difference within a critical practice. The Hitchcock text has the advantage of being both obsession and testing ground for the methodology of textual analysis (the films displaying something of the 'open-codedness' that drew Heath to his analysis of *Touch of Evil*²) but also, in popular opinion, Hitchcock seems to stand as a kind of index of the fatal inevitability of sexual difference. And it is at this juncture that I wish to situate the enquiry, at the moment at which any critical methodology, however ideologically sound its premises, rejoins the ideological activity of the text and endorses it through the fascinated, and fascinating, revelation of its internal mechanisms. To this end I shall take up some recent work on fantasy in an attempt at re-reading, to shift the emphasis on the films as elaborate machines for the endorsement of sexual differentiation, towards new proposals for the basis of their continued popularity.

It is necessary, then, to give an account of the underlying methodology of textual analysis and its application to the Hitchcock text. This inevitably involves consideration of a series of articles by Raymond Bellour, written across several years. In the interests of coherence they will be taken as a whole, thereby producing an image of a coherent strategy behind what was, undoubtedly a far less knowing moment of critical hermeneutics. My argument is not with the validity of the methodology or its findings but with the way in which that critical machine may be and has been appropriated, for a dangerous popularisation of pre-set truisms of the nature of sexual difference and a concomitant assertion of a masochistic attitude of the female spectator. (An obvious example is Robin Wood's analysis of *Rear Window* and *Vertigo* in which, following his reading of Bellour, the spectator is 'unambiguously male'.³)

The Hollywood Machine and Hitchcock

The following is by no means an exhaustive account of either Bellour's work in textual analysis or the underlying theory of textual analysis as elaborated, in literature, by Roland Barthes and others. There is a comparative wealth of material on this subject⁴ and I do not intend to

² See Stephen Heath, 'Film and System, Terms of Analysis', *Screen* Spring and Summer 1975, vol 16 nos 1 and 2, pp 7-77 and 91-113.

³ Robin Wood, 'Fear of Spying', *American Film*, November 1983, p 31.

⁴ For an account of Bellour's work see Janet Bergstrom, 'Enunciation and Sexual Difference' and 'Alternation, Segmentation, Hypnosis: Interview with Raymond Bellour', *Camera Obscura* 3/4, Summer, 1979, pp 71-103. For accounts of Barthes and other theories of the text, see Barthes' interviews in Raymond Bellour, *Le livre des autres*, Paris, 10/18, UEG, 1978, and Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, London, Methuen, 1977.

⁵ Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', in Stephen Heath (ed), *Image, Music, Text*, London, Fontana, 1977, p 157.

⁶ Raymond Bellour, 'Psychosis, Neurosis, Perversion', *Camera Obscura* 3/4, Summer 1979, p 105-106.

⁷ See Raymond Bellour, 'The Obvious and the Code', *Screen* Winter 1974/75, vol 15 no 4, pp 7-17.

⁸ Raymond Bellour, 'Les Oiseaux: analyse d'une séquence', *Cahiers du Cinéma* no 219, October, 1969.

⁹ Raymond Bellour, 'Le blocage symbolique' *Communications* 23, Paris, Editions de Seuil, 1975.

¹⁰ See Raymond Bellour in 'Psychosis, Neurosis, Perversion', op cit, and Peter Wollen, 'Hybrid Plots in *Psycho*', *Framework* no 13, 1980.

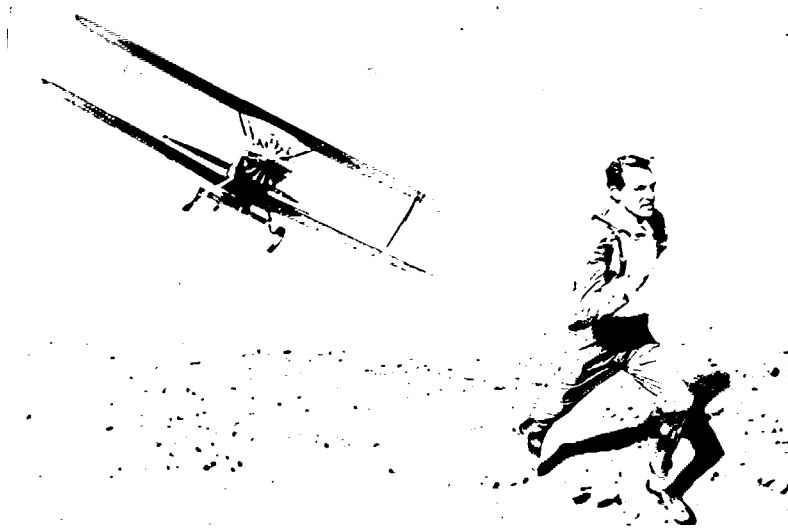
add to this list. But the reduction of such a corpus necessitates a certain censoring of the critical activity. The experience of working closely on a film on the editing table is, itself, always reduced in the transcription of that work into writing. (It is that loss of the experience of the text which leads to an easy account of the findings of textual analysis, at the expense of its contradictions.) But there is always a marginal recuperation of that activity in the writing, usually at moments when it becomes almost impossible to follow the line of argument, juggling a multiplicity of codes. It is at these moments that analysis demonstrates most clearly Barthes' theory of the potentially infinite continuation of textual activity (*the Text is experienced only in an activity of production*⁷). My focus here is the reduced account of the Hitchcock text as a demonstration of sexual difference which leaves itself open to theoretical and popular recuperation such that its potential for transgression is foreclosed. I begin, then, with an account of Bellour's model of Hollywood cinema and the particular relationship that Hitchcock enjoys with that machine.

For Bellour, Hitchcock is the exceptional case who proves the rule, the *auteur* who works within the paradigm of classic Hollywood cinema but always slightly askance to it. Speaking of *Psycho*:

... the film, in a sense, contravenes the classical model of narrative – as well as that more singular model which is both an eccentric and exemplary version of it: the Hitchcockian system.⁸

Hitchcock is part of the system, subject to the same rules and regulations, but with Hitchcock there is always something knowing, a nod in the direction of the enunciation of the text, more coded than obvious. Lang is similar in this respect, both directors noted for their insistence upon vision and the look, marking, through this emphasis, something specifically cinematic.

Narrative and narration are similarly resonant in the Hitchcock text. Narration produces narrative but is, itself, the product of an oscillation, a balance, between terms of repetition and terms of difference. From stasis (A) through a rupture into difference (B) and, then, to the re-containment of that difference in a term of repetition (A'): an Aristotelian model of narrative (A-B-A') in microcosm, something like a fundamental unit of narration. Narrative is the result of this careful oscillation, always weighted towards difference through the course of the story (the film's 'acceleration') and slowed up at the end through the return of repetition (hence, often, the film's rhyme between opening and closing scenes).⁷ Hitchcock works according to the same principle but goes to the limit of possible balance: repetition is deeply insistent, for example, the sequence in *The Birds*⁸ providing and producing an imbalance whose final rupture is the attack. Similarly, the repetition of the oscillation of looks in the crop-duster sequence in *North by Northwest*⁹ or, on a grander scale, the suggestion made by both Bellour and Peter Wollen¹⁰ that the Hitchcock text is an endless repetition of the same basic narrative. And also, as we shall see, there is the implication



The crop-duster
sequence in *North by
Northwest*.

that this very narrative repetition is the mark of a specific psychic structure – the male Oedipal scenario – which is the repetition of Hollywood's and Hitchcock's own symbolic régime, that of Western patriarchy.

Within this scenario it is the figure of the woman which is simultaneously codified as different and which functions as the term of difference which inaugurates the narrative. There is a double movement here which rescues Bellour from any suggestion of a supposed essentialism. Woman is not different (from man) when introduced into the narrative, but it is her function as a term of difference, as inaugurator of the narrative movement which retroactively codifies her as difference. The closure of the narrative, ultimately the containment of difference, is then the containment of the woman, either through her negation (wounding as symbolic castration or death), or through her denial of independence in the socially sanctioned institution of marriage.

The amplification of this system into the Hitchcockian system is manifest in the organisation of looks in specific films. The analysis of *The Birds* has already been noted and it is clear in this instance that the look of the woman at the man is transgressive (and, hence, punishable) insofar as it introduces a term of difference in the place of a term of repetition. That is to say that the look of the man at the woman is acceptable within the scenario outlined above: the term of repetition is that of the man looking, and the term of difference – the woman looked at – is contained by this structure. But the look of the woman at the man is a reversal that cannot be tolerated, hence the symbolic castration through the wound inflicted by the gull on Melanie Daniels.

In the same way that the analysis of *The Birds* demonstrates the regulation of the scopic drive according to the symbolic pressure of patriarchy, so the analysis of the opening of *Marnie*¹¹ traces a chain of (male)

¹¹ Raymond Bellour, 'Hitchcock the Enunciator', *Camera Obscura* 2, Fall, 1977.

looks around the imag(in)ing of the heroine. In this, *Marnie* is contained as a term of difference by the repetition of looks of male characters and the look of the camera across the sequence. And central to this analysis is the figure of Hitchcock, the male director, who uses the male characters as 'fictional delegates' in order to fulfil Hitchcock's own desire. It is Hitchcock's own appearances in his films that is the index of the particular relationship between Hitchcock's films and the larger corpus of Hollywood cinema. The appearance is the ironic underlining, a cinematic tic, which suggests the set of (patriarchal) suppositions which the Hollywood system is forever at pains to disguise beneath the mask of the Natural. But Bellour's analysis of Hitchcock's appearances is also a claim that *Marnie* and other films in the Hitchcock text are all ordered by a logic of masculine desire, and that pleasure within this system is to be found only at the expense of the woman and through identification with the man.



The logic of
masculine desire:
Marnie.

Hitchcock the Enunciator

¹² See Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' and 'From Work to Text' in *Image, Music, Text*, op cit, and 'Theory of the Text', in Robert Young (ed), *Untying the Text*, op cit.

The starting point for much textual analysis in the '70s was the theory of the text outlined by Roland Barthes. A series of early polemical essays¹² argued for a new methodological field in opposition to a reductive, author-based, reflection criticism, principally in the field of literature. Against the search for the unified reading, against the final signified, Barthes foregrounded the very activity of signification, and argued for a general theory of signification and of the subject's place within that production. Ultimately, the theory of the text was a refusal of the meta-

lingualism of traditional criticism and for the promotion of criticism itself to the level of literary production.

This approach demanded the death of the author as source and guarantor of the meaning of the statement (*énoncé*) and insisted upon the site of enunciation (*énonciation*) as the locus of the production of meaning. Traditional criticism's mistake was in insisting that there was only ever one enunciation, that of the author, and that his/her intentions were the guarantee of meaning of the statement. But Emile Benveniste demonstrated that any statement is to a lesser or greater degree dependent upon its context for its meaning. The point is made clear in his study of 'deictics' or shifters, words which have no fixed meaning but which are context dependent. A word like 'I', for example, is dependent upon who utters it for its meaning. Equally, the word 'now', at the time at which I write it, has a different signified from that at the time at which you read it. What such examples demonstrate is the split between the moment of uttering the statement (the enunciation) and the statement itself (the enounced) as an 'independent' structure.¹³

In the same way that a shifter like the word 'I' is dependent for its meaning upon the moment at which it is uttered and who utters it, so the text could be thought of as context-dependent. The readerly text could be made writerly¹⁴ by the textual critic, could be made to speak that which it tried to keep silent (and which traditional criticism endeavoured to keep silent) – sexuality, economics, contradiction. *S/Z* is the obvious text-case, an elaborate critical machine for the re-production of Balzac's novella *Sarrasine*, a sort of *hommage* to the complexity of signification in its proportion of textual reading to text.

For Bellour *S/Z* is exemplary. His reading of *North by Northwest* follows two codes suggested by Barthes (the Hermeneutic and the Symbolic¹⁵), and his article, 'The Unattainable Text'¹⁶, is a treatise on that aspect of Barthes' theory which film so readily yields – the continual spiralling away of enunciation, of signification. Again, it is enunciation as a concept derived from linguistics which occupies a central position. Enunciation is viewed as a dynamic of the text, as the site of the production of meaning and, inversely, as the point around which all activity coheres. For certain cases this locus is realised as an actual figure in the text. The figure is termed 'the Enunciator' by Bellour¹⁷ and is identified in Dumas' novels as the character Balsamo and, in the Hitchcock text, as the figure of Hitchcock and his fictional delegates. Importantly, the figure of Hitchcock is not the author for, at its simplest, the figure is part of the text, part of the enounced as opposed to the enunciation. But, as a result of this critical account, Hitchcock, author and myth, comes to reclaim that text, to reappropriate the film as the mark of his obsessions. This movement is clear in the popular reception of Hitchcock movies where his appearances, together with the desire to see a Hitchcock film (where 'he' will manipulate you) and to recognise stylistic tics, are all part of the shared experience of seeing a 'Hitchcock film'. There is a strong argument against Bellour's repetition of this

¹³ See Emile Benveniste, 'Man and Language' in *Problems in General Linguistics*, University of Miami Press, 1971.

¹⁴ See Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1974, for a working account of the distinctions between readerly and writerly.

¹⁵ Barthes deploys five codes, described as 'voices' within the text, in his analysis of Balzac's novella, *Sarrasine*: the Symbolic, the Hermeneutic, the Proairetic, the Semic and the Cultural/Reference code. Bellour employs the Symbolic and Hermeneutic codes. The former is originally defined as the voice of the Symbol and the latter is defined as the voice of Truth. The Hermeneutic code covers the scene of enigmas, questions, suspensions and answers in the realist text, in which there are no narrative 'loose ends' to disturb the flow and the completion of the narration.

¹⁶ Raymond Bellour, 'The Unattainable Text', *Screen*, Autumn, 1975, vol 16 no 3, pp 19-27.

¹⁷ Bellour develops this theory in 'L'Enonciateur' in *Recherches Poétiques I*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1975, and 'Un jour, la castration' in *L'Arc* no 71, 1978. The assertion of 'Hitchcock the Enunciator' is not

one supported by the original French article but was the compromise agreed by the *Camera Obscura* collective for the untranslatable 'énoncer'. Literally, this means 'to énoncer', but the verb in this infinitive form suggests the common root for both *énoncé*, the enounced, and *énonciation*, the enunciation. I am indebted to Constance Penley for this point.

pattern in 'Hitchcock the Enunciator', but less convincing is the argument against the reduction of these texts to one symbolic trajectory: Hitchcock the Enunciator—Fictional Delegates—Spectator.

These are the terms of the argument, and the unifying thread of these terms is an enunciatory drive, or a 'film wish', which is manifestly a masculine desire. Hitchcock the man employs/is employed by male fictional delegates whose desire, in the case of *Marnie*, is for the possession of the woman, for her containment. And, as a further link in the chain, there is the spectator, positioned as male for this enunciation, invited to play the game of possession and dispossession of the image of Marnie. The same schema is in operation in Bellour's analysis of *North by Northwest* where the enunciation of the film text is shown to be, unequivocally, the male Oedipal trajectory, and this enunciatory drive is again linked to Hitchcock through his appearance. *North by Northwest* is also cited in a section of 'Hitchcock the Enunciator' in which Bellour discusses several other films to show how Hitchcock's appearances serve as an ironic condensation of the particular obsession of the enunciation, inevitably a male problematic. The circle is complete: from enunciation as a male concern, through male fictional delegates, to the (male) spectator.

But is the text so contained and so containing? Is this demonstration of the enunciation, however impressive, incontrovertible? On a purely linguistic level, there is never only one possible enunciation, marking the potential of infinite variation, repetition, inflection and reproduction. The point has been made by Mary Ann Doane in a slightly different form¹⁸. She argues for a dialogical text, a text of irony where two potential enunciations continually confront each other in the production of a subtle contradiction. In a discussion of 'Hitchcock the Enunciator' she provides a credible alternative to Bellour's reading, suggesting that the play of possession and re-possession of Marnie marks a hesitancy of the patriarchal hand, a resistance to such analytic closure centred on the figure of the woman. The re-viewing of the film in this light throws the previous viewing experience against the present one and produces an ironic distance from the male obsession that the text seemed to display. The bounded film is unsettled, the male bonding questioned and the grain of the text revealed.

What this consideration also reveals is the way in which Bellour's analyses of Hitchcock's films tend to cohere around one issue, that of male psychosis, which pushes textual analysis into the sphere of a final signified. In other words, these textual analyses depart from a Barthesian account of the text at the moment at which they discover a principle of consistency. Certainly, Bellour's project is not that of a happy pluralism, but, instead, evidences a more political concern for an understanding of patriarchal culture and its operation in popular texts (principally the nineteenth-century novel and the Hollywood film). Given the nature of enunciation and the potential of any text for oppositional readings, however, it is important to examine in more detail this principle of consistency and its derivation.

¹⁸ Mary Ann Doane, *The Dialogical Text: Filmic Irony and the Spectator*, unpublished PhD thesis, Iowa, 1979.

It is the symbolic as a psychoanalytic category which is the principle methodological constituent of the Bellourian system, the symbolic as it is found in the work of Lévi-Strauss, Lacan and, particularly, Rosolato. The notion is a complex one¹⁹ which, somewhat simplistically, we might define as that system or structure of differences constitutive of language into which the child is born(e) and within which the child must take his/her place in order to be identified/to gain identity. The symbolic is conceived as a network of pre-existent signifiers, an existent order, within which the child/adult must situate itself throughout existence in order to attempt a stable subject position. Equally, though, any consideration of the symbolic will be concerned with signification itself, with any meaning production (and this is particularly true of Metz's consideration of the symbolic), rather than simply with the description of existent symbolic systems such as kinship and marriage laws, systems of art and economic relations. For it is simultaneously the entry into the symbolic and the acquisition of language which is the production for the subject of meaning.

Bellour's consideration of the symbolic and his use of it as a category is limited, in the main, to a consideration of its function as the locus for the establishment and sustenance of a stable and staple masculine identity. The symbolic, for Bellour, is focused upon the male Oedipal myth and upon a consideration of that myth as the nucleus of male identity and male neuroses. In one sense, at least, the relationship between the Oedipus complex and the symbolic is highly privileged for, in anthropology, it is the direct representation of a universal marriage prohibition and, in psychoanalysis, it represents the universal experience of the male child in his quest for understanding, for identity and for his position within the family. Bellour's essay on *North by Northwest* is an elaborate and highly detailed account of the enunciation of the film as a male Oedipal trajectory. The passage of the hero from the security of the family into his mistaken flight as 'wrong man' from the law is, Bellour suggests, the same Oedipal scenario outlined by Freud and Lacan in which the boy child must find his place in relation to desire and the law.

The analysis draws on Guy Rosolato's account of the various figures of the Father within a classic Oedipal scenario²⁰, an account which is then used by Rosolato in his own analysis of the enunciation of three religious myths and its relation to the male Oedipus complex.²¹ Rosolato's implicit argument, after Lévi-Strauss, is that the dominant religious myths of a society are the direct representation of a shared psychic problematic, shared, that is, not on the basis of any mysticism or telepathy, but on the basis of the dominant group's regulation of their common obsessions through repetition in re-presentation. As Lévi-Strauss succinctly puts it, 'Myths get thought in man unbeknownst to him'²².

The analysis of *North by Northwest* appears, in this light, as a decoding

¹⁹ See, for example, Anika Lemaire's commentary, *Jacques Lacan*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, Jacqueline Rose's introduction to Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds), *Feminine Sexuality*, London, Macmillan, 1982, and her article 'The Imaginary' in Colin McCabe (ed), *The Talking Cure*, London, Macmillan, 1981.

²⁰ See Guy Rosolato, 'Du Père' in *Essais sur le symbolique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1969.

²¹ Guy Rosolato 'Trois générations d'hommes dans le mythe religieux et la généalogie' in *Essais sur le symbolique*, op cit.

²² Claude Lévi-Strauss *Myth and Meaning*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p 3.

²³ Raymond Bellour, 'Symboliques', in *Le cinéma américain I*, Paris, Flammarion, 1979.

²⁴ Raymond Bellour, 'Psychosis, Neurosis, Perversion', op cit, p 119.

of another religious myth (Hollywood as non-denominational church) and this observation is supported by Bellour's reading of Wyler's *The Westerner* in *Le cinéma américain*²³, a further account of the centrality of the male Oedipal trajectory in American cinema. Hollywood is seen as a machine for the circulation and regulation of a stable male identity. Given this outline it is not surprising that the marginality of woman simply conceals her centrality to this regime. And it is in the latter half of the article on *The Westerner* that Bellour shows, through an analysis of Curtiz' *The Mystery of the Wax Museum*, a further refinement of the Hollywood machine as the locus of a stable male identity. The account is one of the pivots of Bellour's work and occurs in many articles:

*... the difference which appears due to woman is nothing but the mirror effect of the narcissistic doubling that makes possible the constitution of the male subject through the woman's body, ordered by a double play of differential identity, based on an effect of imaginary projection subjected to the constitutive pressure of symbolic determination.*²⁴

In other words, that difference which is attributed to woman, which codifies her as the mark of sexual difference, is the result of what Bellour terms symbolic determination, a symbolic pressure, which can be found at work in myth and in the Hollywood cinema. This symbolic pressure works upon the original moment of the imaginary, the moment of recognition of self in the mirror which gives way, almost immediately (the mother granting the image to the child) to the recognition of difference. This recognition of (sexual) difference, the moment of the symbolic, is achieved within the same 'reflective' moment ('the mirror effect of a narcissistic doubling'). This recognition is made on the basis of a reflected comparison for the male child, the pos(ition)ing of the mirror-image as different in relation to the world. This moment of self-differentiation is a moment of identification (the mirroring of self in other) and differentiation (the mark of the failure of that identification: 'differential identity') which is played out by the Hollywood system as a form of symbolic pressure. Hollywood asserts: 'Look at the woman—she's different' in order to promote 'Look at yourself—you're the same (as us)'. Hollywood here is conceived as the patriarchal machine which reflects, refracts and promotes the patriarchal society.

Again, for Bellour, the symbolic is concerned with the stability of male identity, is even constitutive of it. The two moments, nuclei which are present at all times, are that of the male Oedipal scenario and that of the recognition of sexual difference, moments which are weighted, in the Hollywood machine, towards the issue of male identity. The problem with such an account is in its critical repetition, the repetition of a specific symbolic organisation bearing all the characteristics and all the fixity of myth itself. And the application of such a model to a set of texts produces a restriction upon transgression of the symbolic organisation that that very description might be arguing against. Such, I think, is the problem with Bellour's argument in 'Psychosis, Neurosis, Perversion', a

further article on the Hitchcock text, here focused on *Psycho* but, again, encompassing several other texts. It is in this article that he refines the argument that the image of woman in Hollywood is the repetition of the constitutive moment of male identity and here that he outlines what, for him, is the conspicuous organisation of sexual difference in the Hitchcock text:

*woman, the subject of neurosis, becomes the object of psychosis of which man is the subject....*²⁵

This summation asserts the importance of sexual difference as the underlying logic of the Hitchcockian system, although the use of the Hitchcock text as an amplification of Hollywood and patriarchy is qualified later to the effect that the argument is only valid 'given a certain regime of fiction, and a certain order of civilization'²⁶.

The consideration of the symbolic and its use in Bellour's and others' work is concerned with the elaboration of insistent and repetitive narrative structures and their place within a dominant cultural order. The symbolic, then, is the term used to denote and describe the play of sexual difference and its centrality to the classical narrative system, specifically the skewing of sexual difference towards the maintenance of a stable male identity. The components of this conception of the symbolic are, primarily, the positive male Oedipus²⁷ and an 'earlier' narrative wherein the male is constituted as male through a double understanding of differentiation in the image of the woman. And these two scenarios are, decisively, narratives; they are instances not of determinant moments in the history of the subject but accounts of such constitutive moments as they come to be fixed in myth. The symbolic is seen and found not as a structuring movement but as structure. In one sense this is quite apposite, for the child comes to find his/her place within a structure ordained and ordered for it by the parents, a structure anterior to the child and composed of the parents' individual histories and fantasies. But this existent structure is never entirely pre-set or entirely determinate of the child's behaviour, for it is only through the existence of the child that the structuration necessary to sustain the Oedipal scenario is set in play. The symbolic, then, is never simply structure (indeed, if it were there would be no possibility of ever overcoming its questioned universality) and must be considered as the potential of structure—as structuration—as a play of signifiers bearing all the potential of the pluralism of signification.

The symbolic as employed by Bellour and others may well describe the most likely resultant structure for the male child ('given a certain regime of fiction, and a certain order of civilization'), but the text must maintain its potential for the transgression of such systems, must be seen as dynamic structuration. If the text is closed on the order of the symbolic then the overlay of myth is complete: from religious myth to Hollywood myth to critical myth. And it is here that the symbolic enjoins a popular conception of the Hollywood myth, binds text and

²⁵ *ibid*, p 112.

²⁶ *ibid*, p 116.

²⁷ The positive male oedipus complex is counterposed with its negative counterpart, the former involving desire for the parent of the opposite sex and rivalry with the same sex parent, the latter, desire for the same sex parent and rivalry with that of the opposite sex.

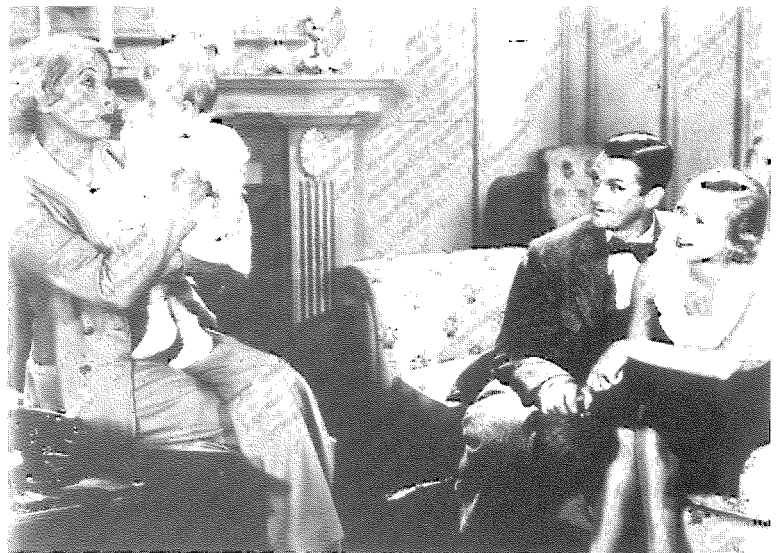
²⁸ I think it is fair, in this context, to talk of a Bellourian tradition of textual analysis. The early work, endorsed through Metz's work on codification in *Language and Cinema*, The Hague, Mouton, 1974, has led to a formal orthodoxy best illustrated by the issue of *Enclitic* (vol 5 no 2/Vol 6 no 1, Fall 1981/Spring 1982) devoted to its International Conference on the Textual Analysis of Film. Subsequent work in this field has been dominated by this tradition and the popularisation of textual analysis has focused on Bellour's work in particular.

²⁹ See Donald Greig, MA thesis, *Textual Analysis and Transgression*, University of Kent, 1983.

spectator into the replaying of the most insistent ideological operations, which is to confuse the aim of the text, its symbolic pressure, with its actual and potential transgression. Woman is, otherwise, the simple expenditure of the text, its cost margin, and the experience of the female spectator is similarly marginalised: entry to the text by any other route than that described by textual analysis is barred.

Textual Analysis and Transgression

A methodology which might unsettle a certain orthodoxy of textual analysis²⁸ is one that I have developed elsewhere²⁹ in an analysis of Dorothy Arzner's film, *Dance, Girl, Dance*. (The choice of film was in no way determined by any simple matrix of 'Hitchcock/male director: Arzner/female director', but by the far more banal requirements of print availability.) My project was to investigate 'at first hand' the methodology of textual analysis and, if possible, to open up the space within that analysis for a transgressive reading. The terms of the analysis were, somewhat cavalierly, the categories of the psychic and the social, the psychic considered as the site of the unconscious and the social as the representation of a patriarchal society and its values. The psychic was concerned with the elaboration of a *female* Oedipal trajectory and, as a necessary concomitant, with work on various manifestations of figures of the mother and the relationship of the girl child with the mother. The analysis produced a provocative confrontation: on the one hand, the film promotes an enunciation concerned with female Oedipality in which the end of the film marks the 'successful' psychic resolution; on the other, it represents an unsatisfactory and ridiculous containment of the heroine



The mother-figure and the female child: *Dance, Girl, Dance*.

in the embrace of a patronising patriarch. It is the collision of these two readings that offers the space for a transgressive reading much like that of category 'E' proposed by *Cahiers du Cinéma*, where the stranglehold of ideology is more apparent than real³⁰. It is the psychic trajectory of the heroine which offers a transgressive identification (transgressing the insistence of patriarchy in the social and in the symbolic as it functions within textual analysis), and also acts as a demonstration of the mechanisms of patriarchy. Irigaray:

*The female oedipus complex realises, ultimately, the entry of the woman into a system of values that is not her own and where she can only 'become visible' and mingle caught up in the needs, desires and fantasies of others—Men.*³¹

The importance of what I have termed a transgressive textual analysis is its ability to unsettle earlier assertions of the dominance of text over spectator in its marshalling of the spectator for one particular enunciation. The insistence of the above approach is upon the possibility of several enunciations within a single text, each 'verifiable' according to the methodology of textual analysis and each in conflict with another. This is at the same time to promote the continuing activity of the text (and here we are close to what Barthes refers to as the radically symbolic nature of the text³²), and to argue for different spectatorial identifications running against the grain of patriarchal imposition (be it practical or theoretical).

More specifically, and as a kind of condensation of the issues involved, such an approach radically undermines critical, theoretical and popular discourses of the films of Hitchcock which figure here under the rubric of the Hitchcock text, for although traces of the female Oedipal trajectory have been located in analyses of *Rebecca*³³ and *The Birds*³⁴, the twin moons of textual analysis and other Hitchcock films still assert the dominance of the male spectator. In this respect there is an evident lack of consideration of those films of Hitchcock in which there is a central female figure (*Rebecca*, *Marnie*, *Spellbound*, *Suspicion*, etc) and the approach outlined above would seem well equipped to deal with such texts.

As has been noted, though, such an approach maintains the binarism of sexual difference in the interests of unsettling a new critical orthodoxy. It is to the notion of fantasy as elaborated in recent feminist work³⁵ that we must turn to escape such an impasse. And, in order to rescue the text from its existent symbolic trap I will turn to the theory of primal or original fantasy elaborated in a seminal essay by Laplanche and Pontalis³⁶.

Fantasy and the Text

Recent work on fantasy has responded directly to work in textual analysis in the '70s and what has been seen as its self-referentiality in its

³⁰ Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, 'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism', *Screen Reader 1*, Society for Education in Film and Television, London, 1977, pp 2-11.

³¹ Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1977, p 132 (my translation).

³² See Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', op cit, pp 158-9.

³³ See Tania Modleski, "'Never To Be Thirty-Six Years Old": Rebecca as Female Oedipal Drama', *Wide Angle*, vol 5 no 1, 1982, pp 34-41.

³⁴ See Margaret M Horwitz, 'The Birds: A Mother's Love', *Wide Angle*, vol 5 no 1, 1982, pp 42-48, and Jacqueline Rose, 'Paranoia and the Film System', *Screen*, vol 17 no 4, Winter 1976/7, pp 85-104, both of which suggest, rather than trace, a female Oedipus.

³⁵ See Elisabeth Lyon, 'The Cinema of Lol V Stein', *Camera Obscura* 6, 1980, pp 7-41; Elizabeth Cowie, 'Fantasia', *m/f* 9, 1984, pp 71-104, and Constance Penley 'Feminism, Film Theory and the Bachelor Machines', *m/f* 10, 1985, pp 39-56.

³⁶ J Laplanche and J-B Pontalis, 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality', *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* vol 49, 1968, Part 1.

analysis of patriarchy³⁷. The problem for feminist criticism has been the role of the female spectator (and, indeed, of the feminist critic) which has been, if not discarded, at least de-centred in a subtle mimesis of the Hollywood text. This account does little to explain the pleasure for the female spectator except in terms of masochism, an account that is all too readily recuperable by traditional criticism. Behind this argument is an often unspoken agreement that the enunciation of the text necessarily marshals the unwitting spectator along the same trajectory of desire that textual analysis displays: the text as powerful ideological tool, the spectator as its gullible victim. The autonomy of the spectator and, indeed, his/her own individual history and set of associations and personal resonances is, by implication, limited to secondary elaboration *after* the humiliating experience of being picked up by the scruff of the text and carried through this alienating psychic trajectory. Fantasy, it has been implicitly argued, is the precise psychoanalytic concept which, in relation to the text, provides the spectator with a 'relative autonomy', with a series of possible entries and identifications with characters according to their different roles and functions within a network of character relations. Elizabeth Cowie has demonstrated this kind of sliding of positions in her analysis of *The Reckless Moment* in which:

*the diverse positions mother, father, child, lover, wife, husband . . . are never finally contained by any one character.*³⁸

What this provides for the spectator is a series of possible subject-positions according to the particular ordering of these oppositions in relation to one another, the possibility of reordering the 'fantasy' in much the same way that Freud's 'A Child Is Being Beaten' reveals a complex palimpsest of possible narratives (rearrangements of the terms subject/object/verb), all of which display potential and pleasurable subject positions for the fantasist within and outside the text.

'A Child Is Being Beaten' is an analysis of a fantasy articulated by several of Freud's patients, most notably those suffering from obsessional neurosis and hysteria.³⁹ It was common enough for Freud to treat it as almost universal and the object of my enquiry is not so much the nature of perversion (as Freud proposes) but the mechanism of fantasy that is so clearly outlined. Freud's first concern is to find out what lies behind the manifest text and, as with the dream, there are several different 'layers', which vary according to the gender of the subject. Beneath the first text, for the female patient only, is found 'My father is beating the child (whom I hate)'—the bracketed part being 'discovered in analysis'—and beneath this text, for both sexes, is the text 'I am being beaten by my father'. In turn there is a third layer, differentiated by gender: for the boy, 'I am being beaten by my mother', for the girl, 'My "authority figure" is beating the (masculine) child'.

Freud's (problematic) distribution of fantasies by gender is discussed in detail elsewhere by D N Rodowick.⁴⁰ But for the purposes of this study, the *mechanism* of fantasy which he outlined can be retained. The

³⁷ See, in particular, Constance Penley, *op cit.*

³⁸ cf Elizabeth Cowie, *op cit.*, p 101.

³⁹ Sigmund Freud, "'A Child Is Being Beaten'" (A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions), *On Psychopathology*, Harmondsworth, Pelican Freud Library vol 10, 1979, pp 163-193.

⁴⁰ see D N Rodowick, 'The Difficulty of Difference', *Wide Angle*, vol 5 no 1, 1982, pp 4-15.

manifest text, 'A Child Is Being Beaten', produces a high degree of pleasure (usually accompanied by masturbation), but the pleasure differs according to the varying forms of the fantasy (in one case sadistic, in another masochistic). What is particularly interesting in this respect is that the original text can be made to yield up at least two different enunciations, enunciations which partake of different modes of pleasure. The crucial thing to note here is that the pleasure is not limited or fixed to the specific mode of the fantasy under analysis. The subject does not 'know' the source of pleasure, is only aware of a text that repeats itself with all the characteristics of an obsession. The subject may derive pleasure from this one disguised text equal to that pleasure that may be felt when the fantasy is specifically confronted in the analysis of another 'layer', but the subject may not choose the pleasure just as the fantasist cannot choose the particular mode of fantasy to be enjoyed. All that is available to view is one, manifest text: a child is being beaten. And the pleasure that that text produces is due to its potential enunciations, enunciations that Freud demonstrates through analysis.

In this light it is worth considering the formal characteristics of the manifest fantasy upon which Freud begins his textual analysis, characteristics which, I would suggest, bear more than a passing resemblance to those of what has been called the classic realist text. (The following comparisons should be considered, ideally, in the light of Christian Metz's observations on the metapsychological status of the cinema spectator and the particular propensity for the cinema to offer a regulated space for the indulgence of fantasy.⁴¹)

First, then, we might note that a common characteristic of manifest fantasy text and the classic realist text (CRT) is in the masking of the enunciation(s) behind the enounced, the denial of an immediate source of utterance of the statement (indeed, for the child recounting the fantasy it is not a question of the source being identifiable, but of finding a scene running on perpetually inside the head). There is a comparative mechanism, then, in both CRT and fantasy for the denial of the source of the text. Secondly, the role of the child in relation to the text and the reader/spectator of the CRT is that, suitably enough, of a passive spectator (and Freud even uses the term 'spectator' in his account). There is, in this respect, no control over the unwinding of the event (an obvious correlative to the lack of identifiable source). Thirdly, here referring to the CRT in cinema, the action or event is a focused part—a close-up—a synecdoche and, as such, part of a metonymic movement giving onto a series of other possible scenarios. Again, in relation to cinema, the event unfolds in an eternal present tense ('being beaten'), a loop repeating the event, always within the paradox of present absence, never quite a screen memory but bearing several common characteristics with that as well.

As such, and returning to a more strictly Barthesian account, the first version of the fantasy bears important characteristics of the 'readerly' which is to say that fantasy, as a mechanism, tends towards this impersonal form. The subject positions that this text can yield are then demonstrated by Freud through the elaboration of the various possible

⁴¹ Christian Metz, 'The Fiction Film and its Spectator: A Metapsychological Study', *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, London, Macmillan, 1982.

enunciations of that text, positions in which the subject can be subject of the narrative, object of a sequence or 'outside' in the form of spectator. And this in itself is a demonstration of what has so far been called the possibility of different entries into the text. That is, I think, what Barthes is working on in a somewhat different form, mostly notably in *S/Z* where, in an analysis of the readerly (in the form of Balzac's *Sarrasine*) he reveals the possibility of different entries into the text. And it is through the notion of the symbolic that he suggests this, the symbolic conceived as a major axis of oppositions, castrating/castrated and active/passive. These are the same terms, clearly, as those in Freud's analysis of 'A child is being beaten', and, like Freud, Barthes is engaged in an account in which sexual difference is itself unsettled. Hence:

... the symbolic field is not that of the biological sexes....⁴²

The logic of Barthes' textual analysis seems to follow that outlined by Freud in his interpretation of dreams and fantasy:

*the logic of the symbolic field is characterised, like the dream, by atemporality, substitution, reversibility.*⁴³

Their aims and theoretical fields are, of course, significantly different (not least because Freud is reliant upon the patient's associations to provide a continuation of the manifest text), but both assert the autonomy of the spectator from textual effects.

Central to this argument is the implicit proposition that the dynamic of the text—its potential enunciations—is not specifically ordered according to the law of sexual difference (for, in Freud's analysis, there are different enunciations—masculine and feminine—for the same enounced) and that, as a result, the same text is equally accessible and pleasurable for all readers. This is in contrast to Bellour's particular theory of the text in which there is only one dynamic of the text—one enunciation—the male Oedipal trajectory.

It is a contrast which is apparent in a useful and interesting interview conducted by Bellour with Barthes in 1970 where, discussing *S/Z*, two opposing considerations of the text are outlined. The argument centres upon Bellour's observation of an Oedipal problematic within the novella *Sarrasine*, a problematic which draws no comment from Barthes in his analysis and which, in interview, he deems of secondary importance, given what he sees as a questioned centrality of the importance of the Oedipal within psychoanalytic theory:

*Moreover, can you be sure that Lacan, in his recent work, attributes as decisive a role to the Oedipus as you suggest?*⁴⁴

Conversely, Barthes prioritises the castration complex as determinant for the subject, the castration complex as a series of moments across a lifetime which is never dealt with and never lived through.⁴⁵ The

⁴² Roland Barthes, *S/Z* op cit, p 36.

⁴³ Roland Barthes, interview with Raymond Bellour in *Le livre des autres*, op cit, p 216: '[La logique du champ symbolique] se définit, comme la logique du rêve, par des caractères d'intemporalité, de substitution, de réversibilité.'

⁴⁴ *ibid*, p 225, my translation.

⁴⁵ Jacques Lacan, 'The Signification of the Phallus', *Écrits: A Selection*, London, Tavistock, 1977, p 281.

Oedipus complex, by contrast, is something which is surpassed, dealt with, mastered⁴⁶ and, through its status as myth, promotes itself as a sort of secondary manifestation of the *before* of the castration complex; the castration complex as enunciation and the Oedipus complex as the enounced. For Barthes the symbolic code is concerned particularly with the axis of castration/castrated in *Sarrasine*, yet Bellour attempts to promote the Oedipal trajectory itself as the symbolic code and, from there, to insist upon the symbolic as the very sight/site of the structuration of the text.⁴⁷ Barthes rejects this suggestion on the basis that there is more than one 'entry' into the text, more than one enunciation. His theory of the text is committed to the continuation of textual reading, as a practice opposed to the halting on a final signified. It is a proposition which supports the assertion that there is more than one enunciation to any text and which argues for potentially contradictory readings within the same text, an argument which highlights the various functions of criticism as a meta-text.

Original Fantasy and the Hitchcock Text

Original fantasies, as the name suggests, are directly concerned with the first enigmas that confront the child and, in answer to those questions, original fantasies are among the earliest representations. They can be reduced to three in number, unified by their explicit thematic of origin:

*Fantasies of origins: the primal scene pictures the origin of the individual; fantasies of seduction, the origin and upsurge of sexuality; fantasies of castration, the origin of the difference between the sexes.*⁴⁸

Consideration of fantasy can offer a different conception of the site of enunciation as a continual structuration (and here I am repeating Elizabeth Cowie's description of fantasy as the *mise-en-scène* of desire⁴⁹), a structuration based upon original enigmas providing models of fictional pleasure which are in no way gender specific. The initial link between the notion of primal fantasy and the Hitchcock text lies in the recurrence of a form of the primal scene as the central hermeneutic of several films. The primal scene is the moment, constructed by the child on the basis of noises and observations provided by reality, at which the child 'sees' for the first time sexual intercourse between the parents. This knowledge and the production of the scene is always based upon the action of the child's investigative and projective capabilities, in the employment of a variety of scenes and fantasies against each other (the testing of hypotheses) in order to come to a 'satisfactory' conclusion. That conclusion is the imagining of the parents' coupling. Central to this investigation, the point at which the child is unable fully to master the information, is the perception of the scene as one of violence, by the father against the mother. Sexuality, violence and investigation are, then, the components of the primal scene, the terms of the original

⁴⁶ 'Every new arrival on this planet is faced by the task of mastering the Oedipus complex': Sigmund Freud, 'Three Essays on Sexuality', *On Sexuality*, Harmondsworth, Pelican Freud Library vol 7, 1977, footnote added 1920, p 149.

⁴⁷ Raymond Bellour, *Le livre des autres*, op cit p 219.

⁴⁸ Laplanche and Pontalis, op cit, p 11.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Cowie, 'Fantasia', op cit.

50 '... why is the primal scene so traumatic? Why is it always too early or too late? Why does the subject take either too much pleasure in it – at least, that is how we conceived the traumatizing causality of the obsessional neurotic – or too little, as in the case of the hysteric?' – Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979.

fantasy and its origin. These are the concerns of many films, but in the Hitchcock text the particular condensation of these issues marks the primal scene as a structuring principle.

In *Rear Window*, for example, Jeffries, the arch voyeur/investigator, pursues an obsessive investigation into the couplings around the courtyard while himself remaining curiously unaware of the potential for his own sexual life with Lisa. The focal point, the actual hermeneutic of the film, is the Thorwald couple and an investigation into the supposed murder of wife by husband, a particularly violent vision of the primal scene. *Rebecca*, in which the Joan Fontaine character (an unnamed orphan) leads an investigation into the marital scene of De Winter and Rebecca, culminates in the description of Rebecca's murder by De Winter. In *Marnie* the central trauma, the narrative hermeneutic, is the child's witnessing of a violent primal scene. In these examples, and in others, it is the coupling, often violent, which produces what might be called the trauma of the film (inevitably also its hermeneutics) and its structuring principle. The primal scene is, as Lacan suggests, always too much or too little, always conducive to trauma⁵⁰ and the Hollywood text's consistent release is in the displacement of its violence into death (a displacement well served by western culture's condensation of sex, orgasm and death).



Jeffries the sexual investigator in *Rear Window*.

The most obvious example in this respect is *Psycho*, in which the primal scene is both the text's dynamic and its obsession. The opening scene offers no obvious problem in this respect: the forward movement of the camera from the roof through the window and venetian blinds underlines the voyeuristic perception of the coupling and, at the same

time, acts as a displacement of the violence of the scene. And it is this violence which comes to figure throughout the film in the murders, acting as a kind of obscene condensation of the primal scene, facilitated by the oscillation between male and female accomplished through Norman's portrayal of Mother. The murder of Marion becomes the violent enactment of Norman's perception of the primal scene, a scene in which he both plays a part (as man/murderer beneath the disguise) and as observer. This is to imply a retroactive knowledge across the film (by which we come to know that it is Norman beneath the disguise) but, even without that, there is a strong underlining of the murder as a projection of Bates' desire through the assertion of his point of view immediately preceding the shower scene. The murder of Arbogast is another enactment of the primal scene, this time with the Mother playing the dominant role and Arbogast absailing backwards down the bannister, arms flailing, in a grotesque parody of orgasm.

Finally, and centrally, comes the account of the primal scene which, for the fiction, inaugurated Norman's trauma and, for the film, the hermeneutic which is the structuring principle of the text. The murder, reported by the psychiatrist, is recounted in obviously Oedipal terms: Mother married another man, rejecting Norman, who killed them both. Indeed, this scenario is *too* Oedipal—its obviousness and acceptability



Primal scene: the opening of *Psycho*.

smacks more of Hollywood's assimilation of the subversive science of psychoanalysis than of clinical practice. But the 'clues' to the original trauma, the trauma of the primal scene as in *Marnie*, still remain. The poisoning must have taken place in the home, for the lovers were found 'dead together. In bed.' Dead together. The very condensation of

violence, sexuality and death that I have outlined. The implication is that Norman killed them in bed or elsewhere and dragged their bodies upstairs to re-enact a bizarre version of the primal scene as *Liebestod*. It is the moment of the primal scene as violence and death, which recurs throughout the film, marking an enunciatory concern with the trauma of the primal scene.

Within this schema the end rhymes with and resolves the beginning (Bellour's problematic in 'Psychosis, Neurosis, Perversion'), the last three shots of the film marking a condensation of, and a release from, the trauma of the primal scene. The body of Norman dissolves into the body of the mother and the voice-over (Mother's voice) renounces violence in her refusal to swat the fly: the union of man and woman is achieved without the accompanying associations of violence. And as V F Perkins has noted⁵¹, the hoisting of the car out of the swamp marks a formal release from repeated downward movements of knife and water: crude post-coital withdrawal, devoid of the violence of the murder it contains.

The structuration of *Psycho* then, is based upon varied moments of the primal scene, different stagings of desire, ultimately ordered and revised through the central hermeneutic of Bates' misconception of the significance of the primal scene.

To date, work on fantasy in film has been concerned with the possibility of different identifications facilitated by the shift of characters in relation to each other within the text, thereby allowing the spectator the possibility of taking up new positions. The problem is succinctly put by Janet Bergstrom who, after describing the argument proposed by Bellour in 'Neurosis, Psychosis, Perversion', notes that:

⁵¹ V F Perkins, *Film as Film*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972.

⁵² Janet Bergstrom, *op cit*, pp 57-8.

⁵³ '... it is the subject's life as a whole which is seen to be shaped and ordered by what might be called, in order to stress this structuring action, "a phantasmatic".... This should not be conceived of merely as thematic - not even as one characterised by distinctly specific traits for each subject - for it has its own dynamic, in that the phantasy structures seek to express themselves, to find a way out into consciousness and action, and they are constantly drawing in new material.' - J Laplanche and J-B Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, London, Hogarth Press, 1980.

... this exchange and/or doubling of roles is not restricted to psychosis; it is **characteristic of the structure of the phantasy**. Bellour begins to approach the question of partial or changing identifications, but only in terms of Norman's psychosis (or, even more sketchily, Marnie's 'split personality').⁵²

If such readings seem to rely heavily upon consideration of character, they do so only in relation to the work of the film in marshalling those characters for a desire which is then structured across the film. The tendency of the Bellourian critique is to read such characters according to the very stereotypes which support patriarchy in its cultural superiority, rather than through a conception of the film text as an existent dynamic which employs symbolic organisations finally to halt that dynamic. It is this proposition, that the film and the work of the film is an autonomous structuration revolving around primal fantasies that comes close to what Laplanche and Pontalis, speaking of the human subject, term the 'fantasmatic'⁵³. In the same way that the subject is found in a sort of infinite play of fantasy, at rest in a dynamic structuration, so the film text might be seen as a continuous interaction of fantasies and enunciations - and any resultant structure is dependent upon the individual position taken up in relation to that text. And that final resting point is the spectator.

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND CULTURAL THEORY

ICA TALKS

Tuesday 20 January

■ PSYCHOANALYSIS AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS

Stephen Frosh, author of *The Politics of Psychoanalysis*;

Stuart Hall, author of the forthcoming *Reproducing Ideologies*;

Mandy Merck, editor of *Screen*.

Tuesday 27 January

■ PSYCHOANALYSIS, PERVERSITY, DIVERSITY

Jeffrey Weeks, author of *Sexuality and its Discontents* and *Sexuality*

Tuesday 3 February

■ ON INTERIM

Mary Kelly, artist, among her works are *Post-Partum Document* and her current project *Interim*.

Tuesday 10 February

■ GEOMETRY AND ABJECTION

Victor Burgin, author of *The End of Art Theory and Between*.

Tuesday 17 February

■ THE READER IN ANALYSIS: ASPECTS OF READER-RESPONSE THEORY

Elizabeth Wright, author of *Psychoanalytic Criticism:*

Theory in Practice.

Tuesday 24 February

■ PSYCHOANALYSIS AND CINEMA – A RE-VIEW

Elizabeth Cowie, an editor of *m/f*.

Tuesday 3 March

■ BEYOND RIDDLES OF THE SPHINX

Laura Mulvey, writer and film-maker, among her films are

Penthesilea, *Riddles of the Sphinx* and *Amy!*

Tuesday 10 March

■ PSYCHOANALYSIS AND POLITICAL LITERARY THEORIES

Robert Young, editor of *Untying the Text*.

Tuesday 17 March

■ HYSTERICAL IDENTIFICATION

Parveen Adams, an editor of *m/f*.

Tuesday 24 March

■ PSYCHOANALYSIS: TELEPATHY, GOSSIP AND/OR SCIENCE

John Forrester, author of the forthcoming

The Dream of Psychoanalysis.

Tuesday 31 March

■ PARANOIA AND POWER

Homi Bhabha, an editor of *New Formations*.

Chair for each event: James Donald, managing editor of *New Formations*.

Discussions run from 7.30-9.00 in the ICA Seminar Room

Tickets £2.00 plus ICA Day Pass 60p. Course Fee £20 (including ICA Day Pass)

Presented in association with Macmillan's *Communications and Culture* series,

which will include a book based on the talks.

Organized by the ICA and the University of London Department of Extra-Mural Studies.

INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS

THE MALL, LONDON SW1 (01) 930 3647

DESPERATELY SEEKING DIFFERENCE

JACKIE STACEY CONSIDERS
DESIRE BETWEEN WOMEN IN
NARRATIVE CINEMA

¹ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* Autumn 1975, vol 16 no 3, pp 6-18.

DURING THE LAST decade, feminist critics have developed an analysis of the constructions of sexual difference in dominant narrative cinema, drawing on psychoanalytic and post-structuralist theory. One of the main indictments of Hollywood film has been its passive positioning of the woman as sexual spectacle, as there 'to be looked at', and the active positioning of the male protagonist as bearer of the look. This pleasure has been identified as one of the central structures of dominant cinema, constructed in accordance with masculine desire. The question which has then arisen is that of the pleasure of the woman spectator. While this issue has hardly been addressed, the specifically homosexual pleasures of female spectatorship have been ignored completely. This article will attempt to suggest some of the theoretical reasons for this neglect.

Theories of Feminine Spectatorship: Masculinisation, Masochism or Marginality

Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'¹ has been the springboard for much feminist film criticism during the last decade. Using psychoanalytic theory, Mulvey argued that the visual pleasures of Hollywood cinema are based on voyeuristic and fetishistic forms of looking. Because of the ways these looks are structured, the spectator necessarily identifies with the male protagonist in the narrative, and thus with his objectification of the female figure via the male gaze. The construction of woman as spectacle is built into the apparatus of dominant cinema, and the spectator position which is produced by the film narrative is necessarily a masculine one.

Mulvey maintained that visual pleasure in narrative film is built

around two contradictory processes: the first involves objectification of the image and the second identification with it. The first process depends upon 'direct scopophilic contact with the female form displayed for [the spectator's] enjoyment'² and the spectator's look here is active and feels powerful. This form of pleasure requires the separation of the 'erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen'³. This 'distance' between spectator and screen contributes to the voyeuristic pleasure of looking in on a private world. The second form of pleasure depends upon the opposite process, an identification with the image on the screen 'developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego'⁴. The process of identification in the cinema, Mulvey argued, like the process of objectification, is structured by the narrative. It offers the spectator the pleasurable identification with the main male protagonist, and through him the power to indirectly possess the female character displayed as sexual object for his pleasure. The look of the male character moves the narrative forward and identification with it thus implies a sense of sharing in the power of his active look.

Two absences in Mulvey's argument have subsequently been addressed in film criticism. The first raises the question of the male figure as erotic object⁵, the second that of the feminine subject in the narrative, and, more specifically in relation to this article, women's active desire and the sexual aims of women in the audience in relationship to the female protagonist on the screen. As David Rodowick points out:

*her discussion of the female figure is restricted only to its function as masculine object-choice. In this manner, the place of the masculine is discussed as both the subject and object of the gaze; and the feminine is discussed only as an object which structures the masculine look according to its active (voyeuristic) and passive (fetishistic) forms. So where is the place of the feminine subject in this scenario?*⁶

There are several possible ways of filling this theoretical gap. One would use a detailed textual analysis to demonstrate that different gendered spectator positions are produced by the film text, contradicting the unified masculine model of spectatorship. This would at least provide some space for an account of the feminine subject in the film text and in the cinema audience. The relationship of spectators to these feminine and masculine positions would then need to be explored further: do women necessarily take up a feminine and men a masculine spectator position?

Alternatively, we could accept a theory of the masculinisation of the spectator at a textual level, but argue that spectators bring different subjectivities to the film according to sexual difference⁷, and therefore respond differently to the visual pleasures offered in the text. I want to elaborate these two possibilities briefly, before moving on to discuss a third which offers a more flexible or mobile model of spectatorship and cinematic pleasure.

The first possibility is, then, arguing that the film text can be read and

² *ibid*, p 13.

³ *ibid*, p 10.

⁴ *ibid*.

⁵ There have been several attempts to fill this theoretical gap and provide analyses of masculinity as sexual spectacle: see Richard Dyer, 'Don't Look Now - The Male Pin-Up', *Screen* September-October 1982 vol 23 nos 3/4, Steve Neale, 'Masculinity as Spectacle', *Screen* November-December 1983, vol 24 no 6, and Andy Medhurst, 'Can Chaps Be Pin-Ups?', *Ten* 8 no 17, 1985.

⁶ David Rodowick, 'The Difficulty of Difference', *Wide Angle* vol 5 no 1, 1982, p 8.

⁷ Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator', *Screen* September-October 1982, vol 23 nos 3-4, pp 74-87.

⁸ Constance Penley, 'Feminism, Film Theory and the Bachelor Machines', *m/f* no 10, 1985, pp 39-56.

⁹ *Enunciator*: 'the term ... marks both the person who possesses the right to speak within the film, and the source (instance) towards which the series of representations is logically channelled back,' Raymond Bellour, 'Hitchcock the Enunciator', *Camera Obscura* no 2, 1977, p 94.

¹⁰ Raymond Bellour, 'Psychosis, Neurosis, Perversion', *Camera Obscura* nos 3/4, 1979, p 97.

¹¹ Janet Bergstrom, 'Enunciation and Sexual Difference', *Camera Obscura* nos 3/4, 1979, p 57. See also Janet Bergstrom, 'Alternation, Segmentation, Hypnosis: An Interview with Raymond Bellour', *Camera Obscura* nos 3/4, 1979.

enjoyed from different gendered positions. This problematises the monolithic model of Hollywood cinema as an 'anthropomorphic male machine'⁸ producing unified and masculinised spectators. It offers an explanation of women's pleasure in narrative cinema based on different processes of spectatorship, according to sexual difference. What this 'difference' signifies, however, in terms of cinematic pleasure, is highly contestable.

Raymond Bellour has explored the way the look is organised to create filmic discourse through detailed analyses of the system of enunciation in Hitchcock's work⁹. The mechanisms for eliminating the threat of sexual difference represented by the figure of the woman, he argues, are built into the apparatus of the cinema. Woman's desire only appears on the screen to be punished and controlled by assimilation to the desire of the male character. Bellour insists upon the masochistic nature of the woman spectator's pleasure in Hollywood film.

*I think that a woman can love, accept, and give positive value to these films only from her own masochism, and from a certain sadism that she can exercise in return on the masculine subject, within a system loaded with traps.*¹⁰

Bellour, then, provides an account of the feminine subject and women's spectatorship which offers a different position from the masculine one set up by Mulvey. However, he fixes these positions within a rigid dichotomy which assumes a biologically determined equivalence between male/female and the masculine/feminine, sadistic/masochistic positions he believes to be set up by the cinematic apparatus. The apparatus here is seen as determining, controlling the meaning produced by a film text unproblematically.

*... the resulting picture of the classical cinema is even more totalistic and deterministic than Mulvey's. Bellour sees it as a logically consistent, complete and closed system.*¹¹

The problem here is that Bellour's analysis, like those of many structural functionalists, leaves no room for subjectivity. The spectator is presumed to be an already fully constituted subject and is fixed by the text to a predetermined gender identification. There is no space for subjectivity to be seen as a process in which identification and object choice may be shifting, contradictory or precarious.

A second challenge to the model of the masculinised spectator set up by Mulvey's 1975 essay comes from the work of Mary Ann Doane. She draws on Freud's account of asymmetry in the development of masculinity and femininity to argue that women's pleasures are not motivated by fetishistic and voyeuristic drives.

For the female spectator there is a certain over-presence of the image – she is the image. Given the closeness of this relationship, the female spectator's

*desire can be described only in terms of a kind of narcissism – the female look demands a becoming. It thus appears to negate the very distance or gap specified . . . as the essential precondition for voyeurism.*¹²

Feminist critics have frequently challenged the assumption that fetishism functions for women in the same way that it is supposed to for men. Doane argues that the girl's understanding of the meaning of sexual difference occurs simultaneously with seeing the boy's genitals; the split between seeing and knowing, which enables the boy to disown the difference which is necessary for fetishism, does not occur in girls.

*It is in the distance between the look and the threat that the boy's relation to the knowledge of sexual difference is formulated. The boy, unlike the girl in Freud's description, is capable of a re-vision This gap between the visible and the knowable, the very possibility of disowning what is seen, prepares the ground for fetishism.*¹³

This argument is useful in challenging the hegemony of the cinema apparatus and in offering an account of visual pleasure which is neither based on a phallic model, nor on the determinacy of the text. It allows for an account of women's potential resistance to the dominant masculine spectator position. However, it also sets women outside the problematic pleasures of looking in the cinema, as if women do not have to negotiate within patriarchal regimes. As Doane herself has pointed out:

*The feminist theorist is thus confronted with something of a double bind: she can continue to analyse and interpret various instances of the repression of woman, of her radical absence in the discourses of men – a pose which necessitates remaining within that very problematic herself, repeating its terms; or she can attempt to delineate a feminine specificity, always risking a recapitulation of patriarchal constructions and a naturalization of 'woman'.*¹⁴

In fact, this is a very familiar problem in feminist theory: how to argue for a feminine specificity without falling into the trap of biological essentialism. If we do argue that women differ from men in their relation to visual constructions of femininity, then further questions are generated for feminist film theory: do all women have the same relationship to images of themselves? Is there only one feminine spectator position? How do we account for diversity, contradiction or resistance within this category of feminine spectatorship?

The problem here is one which arises in relation to all cultural systems in which women have been defined as 'other' within patriarchal discourses: how can we express the extent of women's oppression without denying femininity any room to manoeuvre (Mulvey, 1975), defining women as complete victims of patriarchy (Bellour, 1979), or as totally other to it (Doane 1982)? Within the theories discussed so far, the female spectator is offered only the three rather frustrating options of masculinisation, masochism or marginality.

¹² Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade', op cit, p 78.

¹³ *ibid*, p 80.

¹⁴ Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams, 'Feminist Film Criticism: An Introduction', in Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams (eds), *Re-Vision*, American Film Institute, Frederick, Maryland, 1984, p 9.

¹⁵ *ibid*, p 14.

¹⁶ Laura Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"', ... Inspired by "Duel in the Sun", *Framework* nos 15/16/17, 1981, pp 12-15.

¹⁷ *ibid*, p 15.

¹⁸ Mary Ann Doane citing Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, in 'Caught and Rebecca: The Inscription of Femininity as Absence', *Enclitic* vol 5 No 2/vol 6 no 1, Fall 1981/Spring 1982, p 77.

Towards a More Contradictory Model of Spectatorship

A different avenue of exploration would require a more complex and contradictory model of the relay of looks on the screen and between the audience and the diegetic characters.

*It might be better, as Barthes suggests, neither to destroy difference nor to valorize it, but to multiply and disperse differences, to move towards a world where differences would not be synonymous with exclusion.*¹⁵

In her 1981 'Afterthoughts' on visual pleasure, Mulvey addresses many of the problems raised so far. In an attempt to develop a more 'mobile' position for the female spectator in the cinema, she turns to Freud's theories of the difficulties of attaining heterosexual femininity.¹⁶ Required, unlike men, to relinquish the phallic activity and female object of infancy, women are argued to oscillate between masculine and feminine identifications. To demonstrate this oscillation between positions, Mulvey cites Pearl Chavez's ambivalence in *Duel in the Sun*, the splitting of her desire (to be Jesse's 'lady' or Lewt's tomboy lover), a splitting which also extends to the female spectator. Mulvey's revision is important for two reasons: it displaces the notions of the fixity of spectator positions produced by the text, and it focuses on the gaps and contradictions within patriarchal signification, thus opening up crucial questions of resistance and diversity. However, Mulvey maintains that fantasies of action 'can only find expression . . . through the metaphor of masculinity'. In order to identify with active desire, the female spectator must assume an (uncomfortably) masculine position:

*... the female spectator's phantasy of masculinisation is always to some extent at cross purposes with itself, restless in its transvestite clothes.*¹⁷

Oppressive Dichotomies

Psychoanalytic accounts which theorise identification and object choice within a framework of linked binary oppositions (masculinity/femininity: activity/passivity) necessarily masculinise female homosexuality. Mary Ann Doane's reading of the first scene in the film *Caught* demonstrates the limitations of this psychoanalytic binarism perfectly.

*The woman's sexuality, as spectator, must undergo a constant process of transformation. She must look, as if she were a man with the phallic power of the gaze, at a woman who would attract that gaze, in order to be that woman. . . . The convolutions involved here are analogous to those described by Julia Kristeva as 'the double or triple twists of what we commonly call female homosexuality': "I am looking, as a man would, for a woman"; or else, "I submit myself, as if I were a man who thought he was a woman, to a woman who thinks she is a man."*¹⁸

Convolutions indeed. This insistence upon a gendered dualism of sexual desire maps homosexuality onto an assumed antithesis of masculinity and femininity. Such an assumption precludes a description of homosexual positionality without resorting to the manoeuvres cited by Doane. In arguing for a more complex model of cinematic spectatorship, I am suggesting that we need to separate gender identification from sexuality, too often conflated in the name of sexual difference.

In films where the woman is represented as sexual spectacle for the masculine gaze of the diegetic and the cinematic spectator, an identification with a masculine heterosexual desire is invited. The spectator's response can vary across a wide spectrum between outright acceptance and refusal. It has proved crucial for feminist film theorists to explore these variations. How might a woman's look at another woman, both within the diegesis and between spectator and character, compare with that of the male spectator?

This article considers the pleasures of two narrative films which develop around one woman's obsession with another woman, *All About Eve* (directed by Joseph Mankiewicz, 1950) and *Desperately Seeking Susan* (directed by Susan Seidelman, 1984). I shall argue that these films offer particular pleasures to the women in the audience which cannot simply be reduced to a masculine heterosexual equivalent. In so doing I am not claiming these films as 'lesbian films'¹⁹, but rather using them to examine certain possibilities of pleasure.

I want to explore the representation of forms of desire and identification in these films in order to consider their implications for the pleasures of female spectatorship. My focus is on the relations between women on the screen, and between these representations and the women in the audience. Interestingly, the fascinations which structure both narratives are precisely about difference—forms of otherness between women characters which are not merely reducible to sexual difference, so often seen as the sole producer of desire itself.

The Inscription of Active Feminine Desire

In *Alice Doesn't*, Teresa de Lauretis explores the function of the classic masculine Oedipal trajectory in dominant narrative. The subjects which motivate the narrative along the logic of the 'Oedipus', she argues, are necessarily masculine.

*However varied the conditions of the presence of the narrative form in fictional genres, rituals or social discourses, its movement seems to be that of a passage, a transformation predicated on the figure of the hero, a mythical subject... the single figure of the hero who crosses the boundary and penetrates the other space. In so doing, the hero, the mythical subject, is constructed as a human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death;*²⁰

¹⁹ For a discussion of films which might be included under this category, see Caroline Sheldon, 'Lesbians and Film; Some Thoughts' in Richard Dyer (ed), *Gays and Film*, New York, Zoetrope, revised edition 1984.

²⁰ Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics and the Cinema*, London, Macmillan, 1984, pp 113, 119.

²¹ *ibid*, p 121.

²² See, for example, Sigmund Freud, 'Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes' (1925) in *On Sexuality*, Pelican Freud Library vol 7, Harmondsworth, 1977, pp 331-343.

De Lauretis then proceeds to outline the significance of this division between masculine and feminine within the textual narrative in terms of spectatorship.

*Therefore, to say that narrative is the production of Oedipus is to say that each reader—male or female—is constrained and defined within the two positions of a sexual difference thus conceived: male-hero-human, on the side of the subject; the female-obstacle-boundary-space, on the other.*²¹

As de Lauretis herself acknowledges later in the chapter, this analysis leaves little space for either the question of the feminine subject in the narrative, or the pleasures of desire and identification of the women in the audience. In order to explore these questions more concretely, I want to discuss two texts—one a Hollywood production of 1950, the other a recent US 'independent'—whose central narrative concern is that of female desire. Both *All About Eve* and *Desperately Seeking Susan* have female protagonists whose desires and identifications move the narratives forward. In de Lauretis's terms, these texts construct not only a feminine object of desire in the narrative, but also a feminine subject of that desire.

All About Eve is particularly well suited to an analysis of these questions, as it is precisely about the pleasures and dangers of spectatorship for women. One of its central themes is the construction and reproduction of feminine identities, and the activity of looking is highlighted as an important part of these processes. The narrative concerns two women, a Broadway star and her most adoring spectator, Eve. In its course, we witness the transformation of Eve Butler (Anne Baxter) from spectator to star herself. The pleasures of spectatorship are emphasised by Eve's loyal attendance at every one of Margot Channing's (Bette Davis) performances. Its dangers are also made explicit as an intense rivalry develops between them. Eve emerges as a greedy and ambitious competitor, and Margot steps down from stardom into marriage, finally enabling her protégée to replace her as 'actress of the year' in a part written originally for Margot.

Eve's journey to stardom could be seen as the feminine equivalent to the masculine Oedipal trajectory described by de Lauretis above. Freud's later descriptions of the feminine Oedipal journey²² contradict his previous symmetrical model wherein the girl's first love object is her father, as the boy's is his mother. In his later arguments, Freud also posited the mother as the girl's first love object. Her path to heterosexuality is therefore difficult and complex, since it requires her not only to relinquish her first object, like the boy, but to transform both its gender (female to male) and the aim (active to passive) directed at it. Up to this point, active desire towards another woman is an experience of all women, and its re-enactment in *All About Eve* may constitute one of the pleasures of spectatorship for the female viewer.

Eve is constantly referred to as innocent and childlike in the first half of the film and her transformation involves a process of maturation, of

becoming a more confident adult. First she is passionately attached to Margot, but then she shifts her affection to Margot's lover Bill, attempting unsuccessfully to seduce him. Twice in the film she is shown interrupting their intimacy: during their farewell at the airport and then during their fierce argument about Margot's jealousy, shortly before Bill's welcome-home party. Eve's third object of desire, whom she actively pursues, is the married playwright, Lloyd Richards, husband to Margot's best friend. In both cases the stability of the older heterosexual couples, Margot and Bill, Karen and Lloyd, are threatened by the presence of the younger woman who completes the Oedipal triangle. Eve is finally punished for her desires by the patriarchal power of the aptly named Addison de Wit, who proves to be one step ahead of her manipulations.



Oedipal interruption:
Eve comes between
Margot and Bill
during their farewell.

The binary opposition between masculinity and femininity offers a limited framework for the discussion of Eve's fascination with Margot, which is articulated actively through an interplay of desire and identification during the film. In many ways, Margot is Eve's idealised object of desire. She follows Margot from city to city, never missing any of her performances. Her devotion to her favourite Broadway star is stressed at the very start of the film.

Karen

**But there are hundreds of plays on
Broadway....**

Eve

Not with Margot Channing in them!

Margot is moved by Eve's representation of her 'tragic' past, and flattered by her adoration, so she decides to 'adopt' her.

Margot (voice over) **We moved Eve's few pitiful possessions into my apartment.... Eve became my sister, mother, lawyer, friend, psychiatrist and cop. The honeymoon was on!**

Eve acts upon her desire to become more like her ideal. She begins to wear Margot's cast-off clothes, appearing in Margot's bedroom one morning in her old black suit. Birdie, Margot's personal assistant, responds suspiciously to Eve's behaviour.

Margot **She thinks only of me.**
Birdie **She thinks only *about* you – like she's studying you – like you was a book, or a play, or a set of blueprints – how you walk, talk, eat, think, sleep.**
Margot **I'm sure that's very flattering, Birdie, and I'm sure there's nothing wrong with it.**

The construction of Bette Davis as the desirable feminine ideal in this narrative has a double significance here. As well as being a 'great star' for Eve, she is clearly the same for the cinema audience. The film offers the fictional fulfilment of the spectator's dreams as well as Eve's, to be a star like Bette Davis, like Margot. Thus the identifications and desires of Eve, to some extent, narrativise a traditional pleasure of female spectatorship.

Margot is not only a star, she is also an extremely powerful woman who intimidates most of the male characters in the film. Her quick wit and disdain for conventional politeness, together with her flare for drama offstage as much as on, make her an attractive figure for Eve, an 'idealistic dreamy-eyed kid', as Bill describes her. It is this *difference* between the two women which motivates Eve, but which Eve also threatens. In trying to 'become as much like her ideal as possible', Eve almost replaces Margot in both her public and her private lives. She places a call to Bill on Margot's behalf, and captures his attention when he is on his way upstairs to see Margot before his coming home party. Margot begins to feel dispensible.

Margot **I could die right now and nobody would be confused. My inventory is all in shape and the merchandise all put away.**

Yet even dressed in Margot's costume, having taken her role in the evening's performance, Eve cannot supplant her in the eyes of Bill, who rejects her attempt at seduction. The difference between the two women is repeatedly stressed and complete identification proves impossible.

All About Eve offers some unusual pleasures for a Hollywood film, since the active desire of a female character is articulated through looking

at the female star. It is by watching Margot perform on the stage that Eve becomes intoxicated with her idol. The significance of active looking in the articulation of feminine desire is foregrounded at various points in the narrative. In one scene, we see Eve's devoted spectatorship in progress during one of Margot's performances. Eve watches Margot from the wings of the stage, and Margot bows to the applause of her audience. In the next scene the roles are reversed, and Margot discovers Eve on the empty stage bowing to an imaginary audience. Eve is holding up Margot's costume to sample the pleasures of stardom for herself. This process is then echoed in the closing scene of the film with Eve, now a Broadway star herself, and the newly introduced Phoebe, an adoring schoolgirl fan. The final shot shows Phoebe, having covertly donned Eve's bejewelled evening cloak, holding Eve's award and gazing at her reflection in the mirror. The reflected image, infinitely multiplied in the triptych of the glass, creates a spectacle of stardom that is the film's final shot, suggesting a perpetual regeneration of intra-feminine fascinations through the pleasure of looking.

The Desire to be Desperate

Like *All About Eve*, *Desperately Seeking Susan* concerns a woman's obsession with another woman. But instead of being punished for acting upon her desires, like Eve, Roberta (Rosanna Arquette) acts upon her desires, if in a rather more haphazard way, and eventually her initiatives are rewarded with the realisation of her desires. Despite her classic feminine behaviour, forgetful, clumsy, unpunctual and indecisive, she succeeds in her quest to find Susan (Madonna).

Even at the very beginning of the film, when suburban housewife Roberta is represented at her most dependent and childlike, her actions propel the narrative movement. Having developed her own fantasy narrative about Susan by reading the personal advertisements, Roberta acts upon her desire to be 'desperate' and becomes entangled in Susan's life. She anonymously attends the romantic reunion of Susan and Jim, and then pursues Susan through the streets of Manhattan. When she loses sight of her quarry in a second-hand shop, she purchases the jacket which Susan has just exchanged. The key found in its pocket provides an excuse for direct contact, and Roberta uses the personals to initiate another meeting.

Not only is the narrative propelled structurally by Roberta's desire, but almost all the spectator sees of Susan at the beginning of the film is revealed through Roberta's fantasy. The narrativisation of her desires positions her as the central figure for spectator identification: through her desire we seek, and see, Susan. Thus, in the opening scenes, Susan is introduced by name when Roberta reads the personals aloud from under the dryer in the beauty salon. Immediately following Roberta's declaration 'I wish I was desperate', there is a cut to the first shot of Susan.

The cuts from the Glass' party to Susan's arrival in New York City work to the same effect. Repelled by her husband's TV commercial for his bathroom wares, Roberta leaves her guests and moves towards the window, as the ad's voice-over promises 'At Gary's Oasis, all your fantasies can come true.' Confronted with her own image in the reflection, she pushes it away by opening the window and looking out longingly onto Manhattan's skyline. The ensuing series of cuts between Roberta and the bridge across the river to the city link her desiring gaze to Susan's arrival there via the same bridge.

At certain points within *Desperately Seeking Susan*, Roberta explicitly becomes the bearer of the look. The best illustration of this transgression of traditional gender positionalities occurs in the scene in which she first catches sight of Susan. The shot sequence begins with Jim seeing Susan and is immediately followed with Roberta seeing her. It is, however, Roberta's point of view which is offered for the spectator's identification. Her look is specified by the use of the pay-slot telescope through which Roberta, and the spectator, see Susan.

In accordance with classic narrative cinema, the object of fascination in *Desperately Seeking Susan* is a woman – typically, a woman coded as a sexual spectacle. As a star Madonna's image is saturated in sexuality. In many ways she represents the '80s 'assertive style' of heterosexual spectacle, inviting masculine consumption. This is certainly emphasised by shots of Susan which reference classic pornographic poses and camera angles; for example, the shot of Susan lying on Roberta's bed reading her diary, which shows Susan lying on her back, wearing only a vest and a pair of shorts over her suspenders and lacy tights. (Although one could argue that the very next shot, from Susan's point of view, showing Gary upside down, subverts the conventional pornographic codes.) My aim is not to deny these meanings in *Desperately Seeking Susan*, in order to claim it as a 'progressive text', but to point to cinematic pleasures which may be available to the spectator *in addition* to those previously analysed by feminist film theory. Indeed, I believe such a project can only attempt to work within the highly contradictory constructions of femininity in mainstream films.

Susan is represented as puzzling and enigmatic to the protagonist, and to the spectator. The desire propelling the narrative is partly a desire to become more like her, but also a desire to know her, and to solve the riddle of her femininity. The protagonist begins to fulfil this desire by following the stranger, gathering clues about her identity and her life, such as her jacket, which, in turn, produces three other clues, a key, a photograph and a telephone number. The construction of her femininity as a riddle is emphasised by the series of intrigues and misunderstandings surrounding Susan's identity. The film partly relies on typical devices drawn from the mystery genre in constructing the protagonist's, and thus the spectator's, knowledge of Susan through a series of clues and coincidences. Thus, in some ways, Susan is positioned as the classic feminine enigma; she is, however, investigated by another woman.



The feminine enigma investigated by another woman: Roberta finds the key.

One line of analysis might simply see Roberta as taking up the position of the masculine protagonist in expressing a desire to be 'desperate', which, after all, can be seen as identifying with Jim's position in relation to Susan, that of active desiring masculinity. Further legitimation for this reading could be seen in Jim's response to Roberta's advertisement to Susan in the personals. He automatically assumes it has been placed there by another man, perhaps a rival. How can we understand the construction of the female protagonist as the agent and articulator of desire for another woman in the narrative within existing psychoanalytic theories of sexual difference? The limitations of a dichotomy which offers only two significant categories for understanding the complex interplay of gender, sexual aim and object choice, is clearly demonstrated here.

Difference and Desire between Women

The difference which produces the narrative desire in *Desperately Seeking Susan* is not sexual difference, but the difference between two women in the film. It is the difference between suburban marriage and street credibility. Two sequences contrast the characters using smoking as a signifier of difference. The first occurs in Battery Park, where Roberta behaves awkwardly in the unfamiliar territory of public space. She is shown sitting on a park bench, knees tightly clenched, looking around nervously for Susan. Jim asks her for a light, to which she timidly replies that she does not smoke. The ensuing cut shows Susan, signalled by Jim's shout of recognition. Susan is sitting on the boat rail, striking a match on the bottom of her raised boot to light a cigarette.

Smoking is used again to emphasise difference in a subsequent

sequence. This time, Roberta, having by now lost her memory and believing she may be Susan, lights a cigarette from Susan's box. Predictably, she chokes on the smoke, with the unfamiliarity of an adolescent novice. The next cut shows us Susan, in prison for attempting to skip her cab fare, taking a light from the prison matron and blowing the smoke defiantly straight back into her face. The contrast in their smoking ability is only one signifier of the characters' very different femininities. Roberta is represented as young, inexperienced and asexual, while Susan's behaviour and appearance are coded as sexually confident and provocative. Rhyming sequences are used to emphasise their differences even after Roberta has taken on her new identity as Susan. She ends up in the same prison cell, but her childlike acquiescence to authority contrasts with Susan's defiance of the law.



Susan the sophisticated smoker behind bars.

Susan transgresses conventional forms of feminine behaviour by appropriating public space for herself. She turns the public lavatory into her own private bathroom, drying her armpits with the hand blower, and changing her clothes in front of the mirror above the washbasins as if in her own bedroom. In the streets, Susan challenges the patronising offer of a free newspaper from a passerby by dropping the whole pile at his feet and taking only the top copy for herself. In contrast to Susan's supreme public confidence, Roberta is only capable in her own middle class privacy. Arriving home after her day of city adventures, she manages to synchronise with a televised cooking show, catching up on its dinner preparations with confident dexterity in her familiar domestic environment.

As soon as Roberta becomes entangled in Susan's world, her respectable sexuality is thrown into question. First she is assumed to be having an affair, then she is arrested for suspected prostitution, and finally Gary

asks her if she is a lesbian. When the two photographs of Roberta, one as a bride and one as a suspected prostitute, are laid down side by side at the police station, her apparent transformation from virgin to whore shocks her husband. The ironic effect of these largely misplaced accusations about Roberta's sexuality works partly in relation to Susan, who is represented as the epitome of opposition to acceptable bourgeois feminine sexuality. She avoids commitment, dependency or permanence in her relationships with men, and happily takes their money, while maintaining an intimate friendship with the woman who works at the Magic Box.

Roberta's desire is finally rewarded when she meets Susan in an almost farcical chase scene at that club during the chaotic film finale. Gary finds Roberta, Des finds 'Susan' (Roberta), Jim finds Susan, the villain finds the jewels (the earrings which Susan innocently pocketed earlier in the film), Susan and Roberta catch the villain, and Susan and Roberta find each other The last shot of the film is a front-page photograph of the two women hand in hand, triumphantly waving their reward cheque in return for the recovery of the priceless Nefertiti earrings. In the end, both women find what they were searching for throughout the narrative: Roberta has found Susan, and Susan has found enough money to finance many future escapades.

Roberta's desire to become more like her ideal – a more pleasingly coordinated, complete and attractive feminine image²³ – is offered temporary narrative fulfilment. However, the pleasures of this feminine desire cannot be collapsed into simple identification, since difference and otherness are continuously played upon, even when Roberta 'becomes' her idealised object. Both *Desperately Seeking Susan* and *All About Eve* tempt the woman spectator with the fictional fulfilment of becoming an ideal feminine other, while denying complete transformation by insisting upon differences between women. The rigid distinction between *either* desire *or* identification, so characteristic of psychoanalytic film theory, fails to address the construction of desires which involve a specific interplay of both processes.

I would like to thank Sarah Franklin, Richard Dyer, Alison Light, Chris Healey and the Women Thesis Writers Group in Birmingham for their inspiration, support and helpful comments during the writing of this article.

²³ See Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', *Écrits* (trans Alan Sheridan), London, Tavistock, 1977, pp 1-7.

THE LOGIC OF THE VIRGIN MOTHER

A DISCUSSION OF 'HAIL MARY'
BY STUART CUNNINGHAM
AND ROSS HARLEY



Hail Mary: 'In a sense the mystery of incarnation repeats itself in each mother.'

Art is what allows you to turn back and see Sodom and Gomorrah without dying.

— Jean-Luc Godard

TOWARDS THE END of *Histoires d'amour*, a series of psychoanalytic readings of the major historical constituents of Western amatory discourse—Greek, Jewish, Christian—and the major mythical figurations—Narcissus, Don Juan, Romeo and Juliet, the Virgin Mary—Julia Kristeva speaks of the inevitable crisis, the modern lack of an amatory code which is not to be seen to be filled in by psychoanalysis: 'Psychoanalysis doesn't inaugurate a new amatory code, succeeding *courtoisie*, libertinage, romanticism, pornography. It signals the end of codes but at the same time love's permanence as a constructor of positions

for speech.¹ She nevertheless speaks eloquently of the necessity to appropriate shards from a plurality of possible myths to shore up our 'shattered imaginary'.²

And it is in this context that we can place the 'logic' of Kristeva's, and Godard's, Virgin Mother. On the one hand, there is the narcissistic segment of maternal *jouissance*, that which is left over, does not fit into the classical theological schema: 'Their child is probably there, but its presence is only *one segment* of *jouissance*, the segment destined for others.'³ It is this segment that attains its antitype in the story of the Annunciation and virgin birth. Like the feminine wish-fulfilment narratives of '40s weepies such as *Now, Voyager* and *The Reckless Moment*⁴, one level of *Hail Mary* (directed by Jean-Luc Godard, 1984) concerns a woman having her cake and eating it too. Without having to enter the circuit of sexual relations, which, in biblical theology of the flesh, is characterised since the fall by male domination and mimetic violence and, in Godard/Anne-Marie Miéville's work *passim*, but especially in *Numéro deux* (1975) and *Sauve qui peut (La Vie)* (1980) by fetishism, blockage, and mimetic violence⁵, a woman may have a child. And in such a way as to scandalise the male universe:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.⁶

Or, as Godard's Joseph says: 'Why don't you tell the truth? Where did it come from? ... You must be sleeping around with men *with big cocks!*' By heightening the idea that no one *really* knows where a child comes from, the story of the Virgin Mother stands as the place where questions of sexual relations, feminine autonomy, the creation of life, and the utopian 'open system' that children represent, the latter functioning so critically in Miéville/Godard's late seventies video work, especially *France/tour/détour/deux/enfants* (1978), all converge. We find traces of it even in de Beauvoir when she says that 'in a sense the mystery of the incarnation repeats itself in each mother ... the mother lends herself to this mystery, but she does not control it; it is beyond her power to influence what in the end will be the true nature of this being who is developing in her womb.'⁷ So there is a narcissistic segment in maternal *jouissance*, a proper regarding of the self, which Godard captures so well in the scenes of Mary's bodily and spiritual self-examination, and which Kristeva makes so crucial in her examinations of the paintings of the High Middle Ages⁸ and of the transformation of the myth of Narcissus into the Christianised doctrines of *ego affectus est* in St Bernard and St Thomas.⁹

On the other hand, and also still on the verge of a 'feminism', is a psychoanalytic discourse that 'proves that the *desire* for motherhood is without fail a desire to bear a child of the father (a child of her own father) who, as a result, is often assimilated to the baby itself and thus

¹ Julia Kristeva, *Histoires d'amour*, Paris, Denoël, 1983, p. 355.

² Julia Kristeva, 'Histoires d'amour - Love Stories', *Desire: ICA Documents* London, Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1984, p. 21.

³ Julia Kristeva, 'The Father, Love, and Banishment', in Leon S Roudiez (ed), *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1980, p. 156.

⁴ cf Elizabeth Cowie, 'Fantasia', *m/f* no 9, 1984.

⁵ Note the two famous, and structurally similar, scenes of the generation of a 'masculine' sexuality around mimesis, violence and the construction of a frozen image of woman as domestic comestible or 'workhorse': the anal rape scene in *Numéro deux* and Monsieur Personne's train game where he plays the engine, his employee and the two prostitutes are 'coupled' together and each is instructed to act out reciprocal modes of sexual domination and submission, in *Sauve qui peut*.

⁶ Matthew 1:18-19.

⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1975, p. 514.

⁸ Julia Kristeva, 'Motherhood

according to Giovanni Bellini', in *Desire in Language*, op cit, pp 237-270.

⁹ Julia Kristeva, 'Narcisse: la nouvelle démence', 'Ego affectus est', and passim, in *Histoires d'amour*, op cit.

¹⁰ Julia Kristeva, 'Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini', in *Desire in Language*, op cit, p 238.

¹¹ Julia Kristeva, in *Desire, ICA Documents*, op cit, p 19.

¹² Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la Sexualité*, vol 2: *L'Usage des Plaisirs*, vol 3: *Le Souci de soi*, vol 4: *L'aveu de la chair*, Paris, Gallimard, 1984-5.

¹³ Michael Ignatieff, 'Anxiety and Asceticism' (review of *L'Usage des Plaisirs* and *Le Souci de soi*), *Times Literary Supplement*, September 28 1984, p 1072.

¹⁴ René Girard, 'La conception virginale', in *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*, Paris, Grasset, 1978, pp 243-246.

returned to its place as *devalORIZED man*, summoned only to accomplish his function, which is to originate and justify reproductive desire'.¹⁰ The power of the Christianised amatory code of self-love was also predicated on the 'intrapsychic necessity to be received, adopted, by an ideal other'.¹¹ Thus there arises the question of appropriate forms of mediation of such love, a question which Michel Foucault also raises in his examinations of Greek, Roman and Christian discourses of the ethics of sex.¹² We exist in the interstices of, on the one hand, a 'vestigial Christian moral puritanism, sheared away from a theology of salvation which made it credible; on the other, a hedonism guided by "how-to" books, pop psychology and the commercial marketing of sexual fantasy'. What is needed might be 'a way to ask ourselves what is fitting, honourable and beautiful in sexual matters, and our inherited languages of medicine and psychology can only tell us what is good, healthy and normal'.¹³ Arguably the most rigorous theorist of a cultural and moral aesthetics of mediated desire, René Girard, points to the 'universal' cultural mechanism which sees the subject's desire mediated through, and imitative of, the desire of the other. This perpetually sets up the possibility of mimetic rivalry between contending desires that resemble each other never more than when they are enacted as presumed emanations of an autonomous subjectivity. Mimetic rivalry precipitates violence in all its – inter-subjective, social, international – forms. Girard takes the New Testament as a 'scandalous' inversion of the propagation of these mechanisms, this field of the sacrificial, debunking it as it does all forms of mimetic rivalry and substituting a 'good' mechanism of *mimesis d'apprentissage*. Girard finds the story of the virgin's child-bearing to be indispensable to his argument for the New Testament's inversion of the sacrificial order. Anthropologically speaking, the story is structurally homologous to the widespread archaic narratives where gods 'come over' (in the sense of both orgasm and transcendent power) mortals in order to give birth to mythic heroes. The code is the same, but the message is radically different. Such divine implantations always involve representations of monstrous sexuality and always resemble rape – 'the orgasm which appeases the god constitutes a metaphor of collective violence.' The absence of sex has nothing to do with 'puritanism' or 'repression', but with the narrative's differentiation of itself from these structural cousins. And, within the Bible's discourse on the flesh, it signifies a definitive break with the circuit of violence and domination within which sexual relations are played out since the Fall. And, within the Girardian discourse on mimetic desire, it signifies a new kind of subject-model, or self-other, relation; one in which the other is not presented as a fascinating model-obstacle to be embraced and overcome in paroxysmic rituals of sexual violence, as is the case in mythological narratives of god-mortal couplings.¹⁴

So, what, then, to return to Kristeva, of a proper mediation of maternal *jouissance*? In speaking of the intrapsychic necessity to be adopted by an ideal other, she posits a topography of desire within which libidinal maternity finds a place:

... there must exist what I, with Freud, name a 'father of individual prehistory': a sort of conglomeration of the two parents, of the two sexes, which is nevertheless to be considered as a father—not one severe and Oedipian, but a living and loving father. Why father and not mother, when one knows the mother to be she who first attends to us, giving us our first kisses, our first loves? Because we are thereby permitted to pose an intrapsychic and social instance that is not the physical envelope of the mother, which exists in too great a proximity to the infant and risks provoking short-circuits leading to inhibition and psychosis. This 'imaginary father'—the degree zero of our archaic loves—plays the role of the loving third to which the 'I' in process of constitution identifies; it permits the investing of our drives in the symbolic, the dissociating of the somatic from the psychic and, consequently, the creating of a space of play, of the gift, of exchange, beyond separatism and absence. . . . Moment of enrapture: of metaphor. Baudelaire speaks of 'the bounty of he whom all name. . .'.¹⁵

The story of the Virgin Mary and subsequent encrustations throughout the history of Catholic theology, charted so thoroughly by Marina Warner¹⁶, provides a paroxysmic multiplication of positions for the woman: she is all of mother, daughter and spouse of the god-child, and much more besides. And, at certain moments in this history, it was not at all improbable, within this libidinal paroxysm of trading places, for the father's 'joyous serenity of incest with the mother'¹⁷ to find a place in the topography. The slide that Berenice Reynaud identifies in the pre-production of the film might seem exemplary, charting as it does the veritable trajectory of Kristeva's *Histoires d'amour*:

Godard intended first to shoot *The Story of Dora*, about the difficult (transferential) relationship between Freud and his patient—then a story of incest between father and daughter—then drifted from there to tell a love story between a father, God, and his daughter, Mary.¹⁸

A love match, rather than a violent rape? A possibility taken very seriously by the 'death of God' theologians Altizer and Hamilton, for whom the deity's 'little death' was to be taken as the devolution of transcendental power into the incarnated figure of Jesus and, we might add, into the maternal body.

So both nominator and denominator—the narcissistic segment of maternal *jouissance*, the search for proper mediation—in the Virgin Mother equation (a balance nicely captured in the *Magnificat*¹⁹, where Mary both centres herself in the divine order and positions herself as 'handmaiden') converge and emerge around the figure of the body. And it is in this sense that Godard's interposition of his new, very ancient, discourse on the flesh at once establishes a series of connections to contemporary feminist 'body politics' and marks a rearrangement of terms with respect to the 'political' period of his film-making. What is important to maintain is that these are interdependent movements, movements we now want to track down a number of avenues, tracing a

¹⁵ Julia Kristeva, 'Histoires d'amour—Love Stories', in *Desire*, ICA Documents, op cit, p 21.

¹⁶ Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: the Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976.

¹⁷ Julia Kristeva, 'The Father, Love, and Banishment' in *Desire in Language*, op cit, p 156 and also *Histoires d'amour*, op cit, pp 232-3.

¹⁸ Berenice Reynaud, "'Impure Cinema': Adaptation and Quotation at the 1985 New York Film Festival', *Afterimage* 13, no 6, January 1986, p 11.

¹⁹ Luke 1:46-55.

series of precedents for *Hail Mary* in Godard and Godard/Miéville's earlier work.

PROGRESSIVE/REGRESSIVE

If it is true that one of the recurring questions which is asked of Godard/Miéville's recent work is whether it is progressive or regressive (in terms of political 'line', philosophical advancements or formal considerations), then it is equally true that these questions are posed as if there were some agreed norm which could stand as a marker from which to measure deviations forwards or backwards, to the left or right. Sometimes this view has even been maintained while granting that one of the central concerns of Godard/Miéville's work has been to interrogate and challenge the ways in which such markers of political/sexual/philosophical orthodoxy function in various fields.²⁰ If we can only take Godard's work so far, how far do we go till we say 'no further'? For it seems to us that one of the most important aspects of Godard/Miéville's collaborations since 1972 has been their refusal to play the game of progressive versus regressive at all, preferring instead to perform various acts of research into imagining the realm of the possible. In fact we could easily turn the words of René Thörn from 'his' episode in *Sur et sous la communication* (1976) into an epigram for the Godard/Miéville project—'in order to define the limits of what's possible, you have to have some dream of what's impossible'.

This is how we prefer to consider the last ten or so years collaboration, not as a project in which what is possible, what is true, what is visible (in the strongest sense) is already foreclosed, but as a project which invents and reinvents languages of the social, metaphors of the real. At this level our remarks on *Hail Mary* need to be placed in relation to other works by Godard/Miéville, with the aim of initiating a genealogy of their present concerns. What is important to trace has nothing at all to do with discovering an essential or timeless secret at the origin of this body of work. Our movement across the surfaces of these earlier texts, from *A Married Woman* (1964) to *Hail Mary* (1985), would be better likened to that of a documentation of the kind Foucault envisaged in 'Nietzsche, Genealogy and History'. Our concern to investigate the points of emergence and recurrence of textual events is not based on a desire to 'trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles'²¹. Indeed, it is crucial that we describe disunity and variegation in the ways in which themes and concepts are deployed throughout the different texts at the same time as we note their persistent recurrence. Take, as an example, the new, or regained, sense of a cinema of palpable dimensions, a palimpsestic cinema. The metaphor of the palimpsest arises in two markedly variant contexts in recent writings on Godard/Miéville's work: Reynaud's essay on postmodernist stylistics in recent cinema and Bordwell's exceptionally rigorous neo-formalist topography of cinematic narration.²² Both use it in its strict

²⁰ cf David Will, 'Edinburgh Film Festival Notes: Godard's Second Comings', *Framework* nos 30/31, 1986.

²¹ Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy and History', in Donald F. Bouchard (ed), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1977, p 140.

denotative sense to comprehend Godard's stylistics of 'superscription', or writing *sous rature*, the successive layering of aural and visual material, leaving traces everywhere. However, if we take the brakes off the metaphor, we are irresistibly led back to Bazin, his notion of cinema as the palimpsest of reality, and the profusion of images in 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' by which he attempts to persuade us of a phenomenological realism for the cinema. This is an absolutely crucial and legitimate recursion, without historical amnesia, and pervades Godard's and Miéville's work²³ but is nowhere clearer than in the stunning 'orchestration' of the opening passages of *Scénario du film Passion* (1982). Here, in these 'profoundly calculated approximations of exactitude', a cinema reinvesting plenitude in the image, invoking the palpability of the body, receiving from the world's gestures and movements, is reborn: 'So a cinema that copies life, which came from life, which represents life, would be like this.'

THE WORLD'S WORST END

When the time came, I'd have almost enough put by to settle accounts with death... I had my esthetic savings. What marvelous ass I'd enjoyed, I've got to admit it, as luminous as light. I had tasted of the Infinite.

— Céline, *Mort à crédit*

Another example: undeniably part of the body of Miéville and Godard's recent work is the insistence of the theme of anality. Like Godard's late sixties pronouncement that he would insert a reference to Vietnam in every film he made until the Americans withdrew, we might speculate on a similar willed recurrence of anality, until... what? Starting with *Numéro deux* with its relentlessly coherent homologisation of anal rape ('I suppose that's what family life is all about') and the reification of social relations under capitalism ('What do you do when it's a state? When a whole social system rapes you?'²⁴). Already the master terms of the enquiries the two collaborators would engage in were signalled as shifting: 'Not a film of the left or right, but a film before and behind—before is children, behind is government.'

Numéro deux places the question of anality (anal rape, constipation, social blockage) at the structural and symbolic centre of its analyses; in later treatments it slides around in a more elliptical, 'personalised', meta-physical fashion, breaking out on the edges of discourse. Elliptical, but no less violent than *Numéro deux* is its appearance in *Sauve qui peut*. In the film's opening movement, with its breathtaking series of libidinal displacements that set in train a perturbation of positions for desire until the film settles somewhat, later on, on the relations between Denise and Isabelle, Paul Godard first violently rejects the doorman's invitation to ream him and then, in the next sequence, asks his daughter's soccer coach, *à propos* the coach's own daughter, if he ever 'feels like caressing her tits or fucking her up the ass?'

²² Berenice Reynaud, 'Impure Cinema', op cit, p 10, David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, pp 322 ff.

²³ See, also, for the technical implications of Godard's 'recursion' to a *caméra-stylo* aesthetics, Jean-Pierre Beauviala and Jean-Luc Godard, 'Genesis of a Camera', *Camera Obscura* nos 13-14, 1985, pp 163-193.

²⁴ See Laura Mulvey and Colin McCabe's analysis of the film in *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics*, London, British Film Institute, 1980, pp 95-101.

²⁵ See Peter Wollen, 'Passion 1' and Paul Willemen, 'Passion 3' in *Framework* no 21, 1983, pp 4, 7.

²⁶ Colin MacCabe, 'Every man for himself', *American Film*, June 1984, p 73.

In *Passion* (1982), it gets more complex. The deflowering of a virgin (Isabelle) by the film director Jerzy takes place around the camera's movement through Jerzy's *tableau vivant* of El Greco's 'Assumption of the Virgin Mary'. The character of Isabelle, although the process of 'superscription' in the film partially writes over this, was based on a model of contemporary Catholic workerism which doubles both the status of the virgin and is indicative of a greater seriousness accorded the Poland/Solidarity motif in the film than critics have given it. The defloration ('Now from behind... it must not leave a trace') could be read as a utopian moment – shot as a languid, tender *tableau vivant*, after which the stuttering Isabelle is able, miraculously, to recite the *Agnus Dei* without impediment²⁵ – but immediately following this scene a further enunciative superscription checks it with a 'search for an opening, this is not the right passage'. In *Scénario du film Passion*, Godard speaks of the limitations of broadcast television and the need to 'receive' (*ré-ce-voir*, re-see) from the image. Over an image of a 'standard operating procedure' Swiss news broadcast:

On television they never see anything because they turn their back on the images instead of facing them. The images see them.... So does the director, shoving images up their arses. That's how you get bugged.... Your sex is in front, remember, your arse is behind.

In *Prénom Carmen* (1983), the tessellation of anality, inscriptions of an autobiographised directorial figure, religious motifs, and film-making practices reaches fever pitch:

Godard himself sits in a hospital room. The doctor arrives to warn him that he will be thrown out of the hospital if he has not developed a fever by the next day. Godard assures the doctor that the fever will arrive, and as the nurse beds him down for the night, he turns to her and says, 'I know that if I stuck my finger up your ass and counted up to thirty-three, then I would have a fever'. As the movie approaches its end and Godard is directing the film that is a cover for the kidnap, he turns to the nurse, now transformed into script girl, and says, 'That took you a long time to count to thirty-three'.²⁶

There can be no movement up and away without a movement through. This seems to be the trajectory which can be imputed to the succession of texts to *Hail Mary*. It is a trajectory which Godard/Miéville share with major theorists of abjection/anality. Freud instituted the developmental topology of oral-anal-genital phases and posited the relation between the child's manipulation of its shit and rudimentary communication, or, to put it another way, between mouthhole and asshole. Anal regression, he saw, in *The Ego and the Id* and *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, as a founding condition for civilisation as we know it and also, dialectically, its discontents. Norman O Brown's prophetic text for the sixties, *Life Against Death*, was one of the first great documents to recentre the 'intractable' Freud: the death drive, abjection and anality. The whole project of the book is addressed to the need for a working through of

these as a pre-condition for a movement up, to the way out: the resurrection of the body²⁷, a condition, as Brown argues at the end of his book, not unlike the conditions of contemporary feminist body politics. If Brown struggles to fully dialectise the relations between life and death principles in Freudian thought, Kristeva's contribution takes us one step further in her recent diptych of studies of abjection and love, in whose very interrelationship we find the movement we are searching for. The anal stage of development, called by Freud the anal-sadistic to name the origin of aggressiveness, is also the point of ruination of a cheerful, unified phallic-genital identity, and the origin of abjection.

The pairing anal-sadistic/anal-erotic is the playing out of the utopian wish for the reunion with the mother's body under the abject knowledge of its impossibility.²⁸ This scenario of a delirium of utopian abjection is played out across the last decade of Godard/Miéville's work, most exceptionally in the unholy trinity *Sauve qui peut*, *Passion* and *Prénom Carmen*. This last film pays tribute to another blueprint for this investigation, *Last Tango in Paris*, a veritable palimpsest of the dialectics of the anal-sadistic/anal-erotic. As Paul/Marlon Brando says to Jeanne/Maria Schneider, 'you won't be able to be free of that feeling of being alone... until you go right up into the ass of death... till you find the womb of fear.'²⁹

Until what? Until the possibility of a movement through and up is figured. And, at least at this by definition indeterminate, open, point in Godard/Miéville's trajectory, this has been figured in terms of the movement away from the blocked traffic in sexual relations, through the open system represented in the universe of childbearing, and up to the 'ideal story of noncausality'³⁰. This movement, able to be charted through the films and video texts from *Numéro deux* onwards, is also comprehended within the narrative movement of *Hail Mary* itself. From abjection to metanoia to *jouissance*. From Juliette's 'out of my mouth is shit', the opening lines of the film, to Mary's mouth filling the screen, the final image. From asshole to mouthhole. From Annunciation to Enunciation. From Mary's long monologue in the film:

You don't need a mouthhole to eat with and an asshole to swallow Infinity. Your ass must go in your head and so descend to ass level then go left or right, to rise higher.

THE APEX/ALSO CALLED INTERSECTION

And another: the place of the child within the formation and continuation of the heterosexual couple represents the space of a very particular *meeting* of the sexes. As a site of love and its possible consequences, the child is perhaps desired, unwanted or else purely and simply a result. Like a mathematical formulation where one plus one equals three the consequence, the end figure, is borne out of a very particular operation. In the workings of mathematics, it is perhaps easier to see than in the

²⁷ Norman O Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959, part six, 'The Way Out: The Resurrection of the Body'.

²⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror, An Essay on Abjection* (trans Leon S Roudiez), New York, Columbia University Press, 1982.

²⁹ See Andrew Britton's important analysis of the film, 'Bertolucci: Thinking about Father', *Movie* no 23, pp 9-22.

³⁰ Katherine Dieckmann, 'Godard in His "Fifth Period": An Interview', *Film Quarterly* 39, no 2, Winter 1985/6, p 2.

workings of sexual relations. For indeed there is a very large difference between the reproduction of the species and the reproduction of psychological and sexual interrelationships, and it is more often than not that a connection made between a man and a woman results in anything *but* a child. But let's just say that it's a possibility, that between a man and a woman there could be a child. Where is it that this third (not-yet-) person would come from, out of what particular set of circumstances, operations, conditions? Naturally, the child does not come from nowhere, but comes from somewhere, somewhere in the circuit of relations, transferences, bodies, speech, money, love.

This possibility, this third term produced by the heterosexual couple is something which has continued to interest Godard/Miéville in their ongoing investigations into the economies of cinema, communication and sex. Children, as open systems, present an enormous range of activity and (playful) movement to be viewed, considered and then made up into sketches of societal practices. Whether it be finally 'about' school and its tireless regulatory exercises of power (as in *France/tour/détour/deux/enfants*), or else about the family's impossible transformation into a unit (in *Numéro deux*), each depiction is seen as a link in the chain which characterises Western culture under capitalism.

As possibility, as depiction and then following on from this as diagram: each and every relation which is presented could be seen as a line drawing, or a series of lines drawn to mark certain directions and flows. For example, in *Pas d'Histoire* (Episode 4a of *Sur et sous la communication*) a number of images of a mother and child become written over with a video pen so as to be rendered into a diagrammatic



Hail Mary: one plus one equals three in the Holy Family.

sketch. As the voice-over explains a number of readings of this relation between the mother's and the child's body, the complexity of the diagram increases. Each new stroke of the video pen layers another dimension to the analysis, building up (or uncovering) a topography of maternal and infantile relations. Much more than just sexual and psychological relations are contained within these diagrams. If this section of *Pas d'Histoire* can be seen as a revision of classic Freudian and Lacanian conceptions of ego and id or self and other, then the debt should be acknowledged as much as the gain. The debt is not to the scientific claims toward psychological truth so much as it is to the usefulness of the analytic metaphors, or more exactly, the appropriation of psychoanalytic formulations as metaphor. Because between the movement, between me and the other, there must be communication, or as Godard/Miéville say, a river which flows between the two which allows them to link at certain points while at the same time maintaining a difference.

Hence we have this explanation in *Pas d'Histoire*:

It's like the links in a chain, and so you can see that there are links between one thing and another, that we want to link things in pairs so that the chain is made up of three things. So if we're talking about a man and a woman, the chain linking them will be the mother and therefore at certain times society believes that they are linked to each other—when they are working for example. Here, what makes possible love between a man and a woman, young or old, between an adult woman and a baby, is work.

It's the direction in which each figure goes that is important to see, important to maintain. Call it separation, call it difference, or call it the space between two mobile figures, it revolves around a space of contradiction that allows for communication.

Or then there's the first appearance of children in Godard's work in *A Married Woman*.³¹ A very different configuration to be sure but nonetheless interesting in its dénouement. Charlotte is the married woman who is hesitating between two men; one, her husband Pierre, and the other her lover Robert. Is physical pleasure the proof of love or is love the consequence of pleasure: one way of putting the dilemma. And the doctor is of no use in helping Charlotte to decide. All he knows are results, a knowledge of a woman which 'a man already knew' as the doctor in *Hail Mary* puts it. But in *A Married Woman* the doctor is less philosophical when it comes to childbirth:

Charlotte
Doctor

Is physical pleasure wrong?
No, it's not wrong, since it normally results in
the desired event of conception.
I'm frightened.

There's a connection being made here, but it all happens too quickly.

³¹ Unless we count Anna Karina's unfulfilled desire to have a child in *Une Femme est une femme* as the first appearance of children as possibility.

Not enough time to see why or how it is that both Pierre and Robert want to have a child by Charlotte, who can only answer 'I've got one already'—(Nicholas). But we miss what's happening between these points and move into another set of gestures and questions. And to Charlotte's question to the doctor—'Can you give me painless childbirth?'—there is no answer.

There is another sense in which the child arises out of a meeting of some kind. Not merely as part of a chain, but also as the consequence of an *intersection* of differing lines of flight, the angle at which forces meet. We might, for example, have the mother who is moving in one direction and the child who heads towards another—in *Pas d'Histoire* it's suggested that if the child is looking for time, the mother would be looking for space. In *The Book of Mary* (directed by Anne-Marie Miéville, 1984) the relation is set up slightly differently as we learn in the scene where Mary is taught about triangles by her father:

Paul	Know what a jagged line is?
Marie	One that changes direction.
Paul	Yes but how?
Marie	By forming angles.
Paul	And an angle?
Marie	Its when the line closes.
Paul	And when they meet?
Marie	That's the apex.
Paul	Also called intersection.
Marie	Angles like this (demonstrates V).
Paul	Like this, too (demonstrates Δ).
Marie	No, its like this (V).
Paul	To get that, (V), you first need this (Δ).

³² Mary—Mother—Father; Mary—Mother—Lover; Mary—man on train—Panther; Joseph—Mary—Juliette; Professor—Eva—Wife; Joseph—Mary—Gabriel.

³³ 'Three quarters of all films confuse the frame with the viewfinder of the camera, whereas what the frame means is this: when does one begin the shot and when does one cut it—in other words the frame is in time....'—Jean-Luc Godard quoted in *Framework* no 13, 1981, p 12.

Many accounts of this scene, perhaps too quickly, conclude that this exchange is a lesson in sexual difference, the father imposing a rationalistic phallic logic over a feminine discourse, as opposed to the mother who teaches Marie non-rational lessons about love and memory. However this reading tends to miss the crux of the matter, which to us seems to be ordered around the idea of intersection. It's no coincidence that the lesson centres around triangles (instead of squares, circles or whatever) as the triangle is a diagram of interpersonal relations as much as it is the domain of pure mathematics. Both *Book of Mary* and *Hail Mary* are built around triangular relationships which vary in type—isosceles, equilateral, right angle.³² Of equal importance is the idea of a jagged line being characterised by constant changes of direction and a resultant proliferation of angles. Which is exactly what happens at the level of both narrative and composition in Godard/Miéville. Each new sequence is like a re-organisation of the angles which provide anchor points for character relations and narrative movement. This is what's interesting about Godard/Miéville's sense of framing, the fact that their frame is used in a temporal sense more than a spatial one.³³ The parameters of an

image are viewed in relation to duration, and following on from this, the bounds of a particular grouping of images (say the number of shots that make up a sequence) are marked or framed by a particular tempo. In talking about Godard/Miéville's work it is commonplace to say that their staging of the *mise-en-scène* is continually disruptive, full of breaks in the flow and changes in direction. However, this irregularity of rhythm is tied up with, though not reducible to, an angular deployment of time and space. Maybe we could even say that this rhythm sets up another relation of angles where the play of differentiated speeds produces another layer of intersecting discourses. And if it's the case that the intersection of two lines proceeding in different directions produces an angle, it is also likely that this meeting space embodies opposites, differences and antagonisms—in short the realm of contradiction.

It is important to understand the sense in which Godard/Miéville's more recent work advances and maintains this realm of contradiction, as it is not at all in the ways that we might expect. A film like *Tout va bien* (1972, directed by Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin) would illustrate the familiar image of a cinema that embodies disparity by laying a series of competing discourses next to each other without any attempt to place them in a regime of absolute truth. The voice of the workers is no more ontologically correct than the voice of the boss, and the differences between masculinity and femininity as played by Montand and Fonda are never resolved by the diegesis. Another, different example of what a contradictory cinema might look like would be *Sauve qui peut*, where fetishistic sexual relations and commerce intersect to produce a carnivalesque depiction of various social/sexual chains of command. Actions are never equated to being, but instead to social modes of performance, scripted and directed anonymously elsewhere, outside of consciousness.³⁴

To many, *Hail Mary* would represent the culmination of a latter day tendency in Godard to approach continuity and non-contradiction. Its narrative structure and visual motifs appear to be in total opposition to the proliferation of angles and discontinuous intersection. One of the least familiar aspects of *Hail Mary* (in terms of the Godard/Miéville oeuvre) is the abundance of natural symbolism—a plethora of 'stunning' shots of the moon, clouds, sunsets, rain, sea, fields and animals which Godard claims were photographed in the tradition of Disney wildlife documentary.³⁵ On the visual level the recurring figure is not an angle or the triangle, but the circle. Symbol of continuity, plenitude and stasis, the circle would seem to be the wrong geometric form to choose in maintaining discontinuity.

However when we consider the use of the idea of the circle in other Godard/Miéville works, we find that there is a different sense being put forward. First, the image of the circle is not used to show stasis but movement. At each point of the circle is movement which constitutes a kind of circulation. Again, in *Pas d'Histoire* this circulation is dealt with as a way of showing the complexity of relations between perception,

³⁴ Note the prevalence of admonitions and exclamations like 'say your line' or 'I forget my lines' in *Sauve qui peut*, *Passion* and *Hail Mary*.

³⁵ Katherine Dieckmann, op cit, p 3.

³⁶ F Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, quoted in Michel Foucault, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, op cit, p 143.

subjectivity and exteriority. As we can see from the lengthy extract that follows, circulation necessarily involves movement, difference and contradiction:

And how is it that me becomes the other and the other becomes me? Well, there is a circular connection between me and the other. It goes round and round. And if it goes round and round like that, it means that there it is a circle. And the circle is me. It is the id... And if it can call that me, it is because it has become the other... There is a circular connection... but what's important is the separation between the two. And it's because there's this separation that you can go from one to the other, and there is this circular movement... There is a separation between the two and if you make it a bit wider you could perhaps call it a river... Every time there is communication... a moment of communication goes via the river and comes back again, and continues all around the circle... What you mustn't forget is the river in the middle... the current... and when you get rid of the current, when you get rid of what moves, when you get rid of contradictions... that's what's wrong with western thinking, with the cast of mind which derives from Aristotle and which always get rid of the current that passes through two things.

As a link in the chain of sounds and images which make up the world and its metaphors, the circle is like a visual shorthand for the points at which a movement crosses from one side to another. If we were to illustrate this diagrammatically we would also see that this chain is made up of a series of consecutive overlappings, intersections, links. In *Hail Mary* the continual grouping of shots of the moon, basketballs, lamps and the pregnant Mary's body is not 'a metaphysical extension which arises from the belief that things are most precious at the moment of their birth'³⁶



Hail Mary: circular connections between subject, object and representation.

THE WORLD AND ITS METAPHOR

The idea that any image (or for that matter *anything*) could exist without its being mediated is unthinkable. Desire is mediated through another, thought is mediated through language, the body is touched through its surface, an image is seen through the frame. On the terrain of sight, language and expression, this mediation is performed via this metaphorical insistence, as against metaphorical extension. The role of metaphor in Godard/Miéville's work warrants a book in itself, such is the centrality of this approach.

In their cinema and video work nothing is modelled on the idea that 'that is that', in the sense that we might say 'the sky is blue'. Instead of an irreducibility of the thing and its concept we get a chain reaction of equivalences – this is like this is like that is like this and so on. Gilles Deleuze points this out, in a slightly different fashion:

Images exist; things themselves are images . . . Images constantly act on and react to one another, produce and consume. There is no difference between images, things and movement . . . However, these sound images . . . have a reverse side . . . ideas, meanings, language, expressive habits . . . So it is possible to make out two currents, corresponding to the gap already mentioned . . . one leads from external images to perceptions and the other from dominant ideas to perceptions.

*We are thus held in a chain of images, each in its place, each in itself an image, and also in a web of ideas which function as words of command . . .*³⁷

There is a movement of meaning that is always embodied in various representations, images and metaphors, a continuing shift in the ground of representation. Throughout their oeuvre, Godard/Miéville have moved across a number of poetic formulations. One way in which we could characterise these transitions would be according to the following schema:

<i>Two or Three Things</i> (1966)	– a face is like a landscape
<i>Numéro deux</i> (1975)	– a body is like a factory
<i>Sauve qui peut</i> (1980)	– to see a landscape from behind
<i>Passion</i> (1982)	– the world and its metaphor
<i>Hail Mary</i> (1984)	– a story bigger than yourself ³⁸

In a 1975 review of *Numéro deux* Jonathan Rosenbaum has noted the ways in which puns and metaphors operate in Godard's methods – 'the aim may be "scientific", but the methods are generally "poetic" and intuitive, usually reaching for the evocative metaphor rather than the precise one.'³⁹ However, since the appearance of *Sur et sous la communication* in 1976 it is difficult to maintain the distinction between the scien-

³⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Afterimage* no 7, Summer 1978.

³⁸ 'Maybe I needed a story which is bigger than myself' – Jean-Luc Godard quoted in Katherine Dieckmann, *op cit*, p 3.

³⁹ Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Numéro deux', *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1976.

tific (precise) and poetic (evocative) metaphors. As we have argued, there is nothing but metaphor, and there is nothing without mediation. Science is no more immune from the imprecise metaphor than cinema⁴⁰, and in fact Godard/Miéville take very seriously the idea that the cinema's evocations function as scientific research. *Scénario du film Passion* is a quite concrete example of how video can be used to research the processes and movements of work in order to discover/produce a direct set of equivalences – the gestures of work and love are the same but performed at different speeds. *Sur et sous la communication* and *France/tour/détour/deux/enfants* mark what is perhaps their most inventive display of metaphorisation to date, and in many ways can be seen as prompts for much of the material contained in *Sauve qui peut*, *Passion*, *Prénom Carmen*, *Hail Mary* and *Détective* (1985). Given the fertile nature of these mid-seventies video projects, it is quite easy to believe Godard's claims regarding the invaluable place of research into cinema. Seeing an image, slowing it down, cutting it up, placing it next to another, superimposing with another, analysing it, running it with sound or moulding it with music is the work which constitutes this research. To see and to hear is what allows one to find a way of dealing with a set of questions in ways previously unimaginable. As the professor in *Hail Mary* says, 'Seek and you shall find more than you dreamt of.'

⁴⁰ As is clear from 'René', episode 5b, *Sur et sous la communication*.

A longer version of this article will appear in *Intervention* no 21, 1987, 'Flesh', Sydney.

A NEW JOURNAL FOR 1987

New Formations

Editor JAMES DONALD

From Spring 1987 the highly-regarded *Formations* series will appear as a thrice-yearly journal. As such, it will follow the commitment of volumes already published in the series to the critical analysis of cultural practices, products and institutions. It will question the concepts and presuppositions of contemporary cultural and political theory. And it will engage with a wide range of recent debates – about meaning and power, sexual and cultural difference, modernism and post-modernism, psychoanalysis and post-structuralism, democracy and civil society, cultural policies and institutions. It will be lively, polemical and diverse, and will draw on a range of contributors from within and beyond the academic world.

The journal will also publish more topical forms of writing – interviews and discussions, critical work questioning particular aesthetic practices, and political commentaries. It will include a substantial reviews section, and will encourage photographers and other visual artists to contribute presentations and arguments within their own media.

Publication Details

First published in 1987

One volume will be published each year

Volume 1 will be published during 1987

Extent: 144 pages per issue

Subscription period: Calendar year only

Frequency: Three issues per year (Spring, Autumn, Winter)

Free index included in the Winter issue

Subscription Rates for 1987

UK and the World: Individuals £18.00

Institutions £35.00

Single copy £6.95

North America: Individuals \$38.00

Institutions \$55.00

Single copy \$16.00

For further information about this journal and/or specimen copies please write to the Academic Promotion Department.

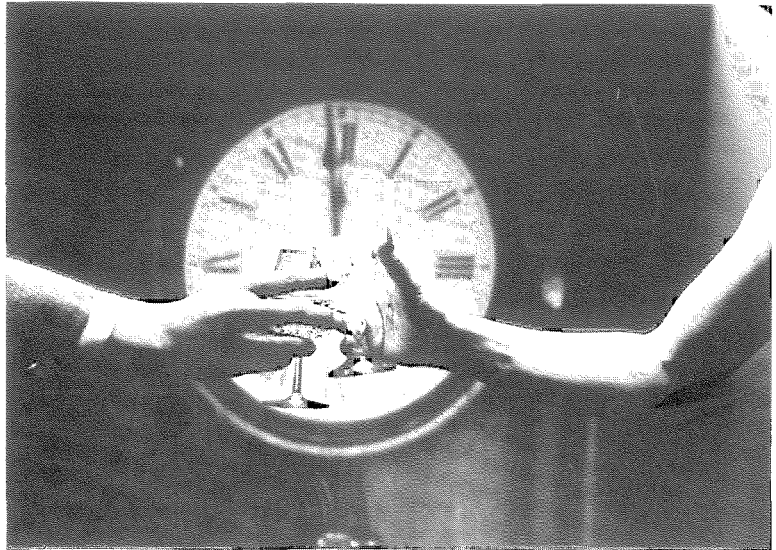


METHUEN

11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

A (SAD) SONG OF THE BODY

FELICITY COLLINS REVIEWS
'A SONG OF CEYLON'



Song of Ceylon: from the *Zvenigora* sequence.

¹ Willis Barnstone, *The Poetics of Ecstasy*, New York, Holmes and Meier, 1983.

As time is measured only by movement, so ecstasy is measured by movement from one time frame into another, from one condition of knowledge to another. The quintessential experience of ecstasy was first made possible when Eve ate the fruit. By her initiatory act, she moved audaciously into the unknown.¹

I

A SONG OF CEYLON (Australia, 1985) is a film in the ecstatic mode in the sense that it strives to move from one time frame into another, from one condition of knowledge to another. It is also a film about forms of negative (in the sense of failing to achieve transcendence) rather than sublime ecstasy, at least at the level of the image. The image track is organised into twelve sequences which set up a theatrical space for the performance of cinematic tableaux derived from film stills. The

soundtrack is organised around the performance of a Sri Lankan anthropological text which interprets and describes a case of spirit possession and cure. The tableaux of the image track and the narrativity of the soundtrack are interwoven by a number of musical sequences including a tap-dance and a performance of Schubert's *Litany For All Souls Day*.

The soundtrack disembodies the film's narrative – to the extent that a voice can be absent from the body. The voice of a disinterested expert introduces the text and interprets, in Freudian terms, the case of Somawathi's possession by her dead grandmother and two other culturally respected, male demons. A narrator sets the scene for the exorcism ritual and describes the events as they occur. Two voices perform the dialogue between Somawathi and the kapurala, or priest. The director, who gives voice to Somawathi, also recites the directions to the actors.

The verbal text has a conventional narrative structure, initiated by Somawathi's possession. The events occur chronologically between 8.25pm and 5am in the course of one night, and are restricted to the place of exorcism, a shrine in a working class suburb of Colombo. The image track, freed from the voice, makes a radical break with narrativity, freeing the frame for a series of spectacles of the body *in extremis*.

The opening shot, of a scar on the back of a body framed from shoulder to waist, bears the film's title and the name of the director, LS Bernadette Jayamanne. This scar cuts into the organism of the body, anticipating not the pleasure of the suture, but that of the cut which fragments the image, breaking up the unity of the body. It is also an autobiographical shot, signalling a point of departure from, rather than fixation on, the personal. The final sequence of the film contains a further autobiographical detail – the director as performer wears a grey streak in her hair in commemoration of her many roles as an old woman in Sri Lankan theatre. The intervening sequences are concerned with the figuring out of the body in theatrical and cinematic spaces.

II

... the sophist idea of *apate* ... considers seduction as an entry into a logic imposed first and foremost on the seducer. ...²

Since Laura Mulvey's seminal article in 1975, the logic of the spectacle has been that of the dirty look, at least for feminist film theory of the orthodox kind.³ The analysis of spectacle as narrative's purest form of fetishism has helped launch a feminist film practice in search of a way around the evocation of the dirty look – voyeuristic or fetishistic in the case of masculinity; narcissistic or masochistic in the case of femininity. Either way, the aim became the repudiation of pleasure on behalf of the spectator. This conception of the spectator's imbrication with the spectacle via *the look*, is a far cry from *the loving gesture* of Roland Barthes' fetishist who cuts out the pure segment of the tableau – an effort of discrimination which yields an Ideal Meaning.⁴ The gesture of cutting out is

² Mario Perniola, 'The Logic of Seduction' (Noel Sanders trans), *New Music Articles* no 3, 1984.

³ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* Autumn 1975, vol 16 no 3, pp 6-18.

⁴ Roland Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', in Stephen Heath (ed), *Image-Music-Text*, Glasgow, Fontana, 1977, pp 70-71.

an intelligent act of differentiation, whereas the look is the mechanism of an inescapable double-bind. One yields meaning, the other produces stasis.

For feminist film theory, the meaning of the figure of woman as spectacle is the fetishistic displacement of castration anxiety. In the idea of the tableau, the body functions 'in the name of transcendence, that of the *figure*, which receives the full fetishistic load and becomes the sublime substitute of meaning: it is this meaning that is fetishised'⁵. It is not the body that is fetishised but the Ideal Meaning (Good, Progress, the Cause, the triumph of Just History). There can be no militant cinema without this fetishistic cutting out of ideal meanings. For Barthes, politics lies with the fetishistic collection of pregnant moments where all absences are present and 'to whose rhythm History becomes intelligible and desirable'⁶. Fetishist art is that which is readable, significant, representational. In its efforts to conform to the master discourse of film theory, feminist film practice has failed to meet the challenge of this paradox: that a political cinema must be a fetishist's cinema.

A Song of Ceylon directs a glance of recognition towards this paradox, as it launches itself into the logic imposed by the cinematic body as spectacle. The film's concern is to complicate questions of sexual and cultural difference as they are marked out on the body. It does this, not by illustrating a set of theoretical propositions, but by recovering the pleasure of the *indeterminacy* of meaning which demarcates the visual from the linguistic. Its strategy is to separate spectacle from narrative, relegating the latter to the soundtrack. To this end, the relation between the visual and the verbal becomes one of synchronicity. The verbal is not used to anchor the visual to a privileged meaning. The image track acts as an accompaniment to the voices which perform the exorcism ritual.

The film aims to lead the spectator astray, or at least provide the occasion for a movement 'from one time frame into another, from one condition of knowledge to another', without specifying what this other knowledge must be. Its business is to suggest that this movement is possible and desirable.

III

For the purpose of this article, I am going to concentrate on four strategies whereby the film effects this movement. The first is the use of tableaux derived from film stills. The second is the analogous movements of the camera and of bodies which droop, swoon and fall. These two strategies facilitate the film's attempt to dissolve the gendered binary oppositions within which narcissism, masochism and hysteria have been thought.⁷

The third strategy is that of hybridisation, especially as it relates to the soundtrack and the musical sequences, whereby any claim to a pristine cultural identity is surrendered. The fourth is the tension between

⁵ *ibid*, p 72.

⁶ *ibid*, p 73.

⁷ Paraphrased from the Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative distribution leaflet on the film.

theatrical and cinematic spaces and traditions of performance, in terms of the film's struggles to retain something of the three-dimensional space of the proscenium theatre in the two-dimensional space of film.

⁸ Roland Barthes, 'The Third Meaning', *Image-Music-Text*, op cit, pp 64-65.

IV

The five central sequences of the film are composed in relation to film stills from *A Married Woman*, *Pierrot le fou*, *Passion*, *Vertigo* and *Zvenigora*. I do not mean to suggest any direct relation between stills from these films and the sequences under discussion. The stills are not reproduced or even quoted in *A Song of Ceylon*. It is the *idea* of the still which is invoked by the film. *A Song of Ceylon* is crucially concerned with the filmic, particularly filmic renditions of the body. According to Barthes, the filmic corresponds to the obtuse 'third' meaning of the image which 'begins only where language and metalanguage end'. The filmic cannot be grasped in the film as it is projected, 'but only in that major artefact, the still'.⁸ This preoccupation with the filmic in the still coincides with a concept of the image as polysemous, as capable of unsettling opinion, of disturbing certainties, of leading the spectator elsewhere.

The elsewhere in this case is that suggested by the tableaux which gesture towards performing the text without being fixed by it. The burden of meaning is carried by each sequence. There is no final signified where the sound and image tracks come together in a climactic scene, at the cost of annihilating all that has gone before it. Each of the five sequences based on the idea of the film still is composed around a 'possessed' body. The indeterminacy of the images undermines any attempt to diagnose these bodies as narcissistic, hysterical, etc. At the



Song of Ceylon: from the *Married Woman* sequence.

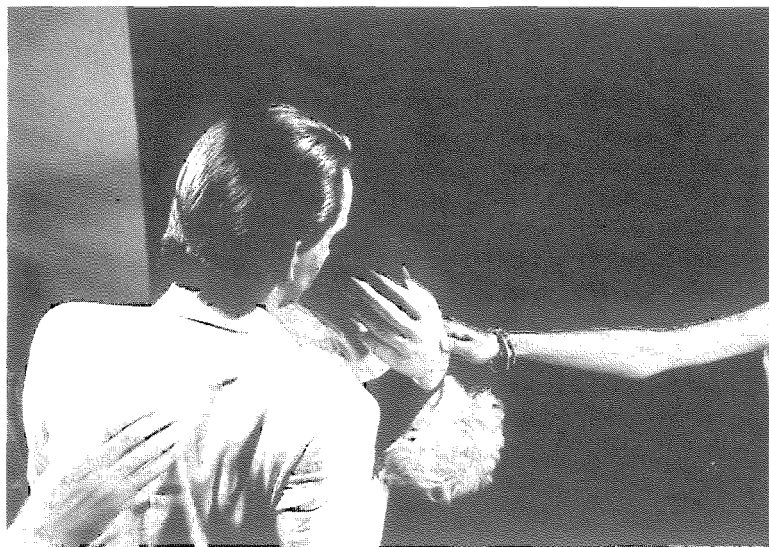


Song of Ceylon: from the Passion sequence.

most, it is possible to recognise certain coded gestures—the nervous clearing of the throat in the video sequence, the self-conscious glances to and away from the camera—as conventions which signify hysteria or narcissism.

Towards the end of the film, after the five sequences derived from stills, there are two scenes which I take as rehearsals for the sequences we have just witnessed. In each scene an actor manipulates the heads and arms of two actors (now out of costume) from two previous sequences—the romantic couple of the kite sequence, and the deadly couple of the drinking sequence. In these ‘rehearsal’ scenes, the actors who manipulate the bodies also seem to direct the camera, with a look or a glance, disputing the sovereignty of the director whose protest we hear in the first of these scenes. The point of these rehearsals is two-fold: to undo the finality of the tableaux we have just witnessed and thereby to insist on their tentativeness; and to signal the final move of the film towards the exorcised bodies which appear in the last sequence. In rehearsal, the formerly ecstatic bodies of the tableaux lose their signs of extremity. In the course of the film there has been a move from the sublime body of the film stills, to the ecstatic body of the tableaux, to the impassive body of the actor.

By taking the most obvious example, that of the transvestite, I can demonstrate this move which I will designate as a form of negative ecstasy. The figure of the transvestite appears several times: in the sequence redolent of the scene in *Vertigo* in which Jimmy Stewart carries Kim Novak out of the San Francisco bay; in the drinking sequence echoing a scene from *Zvenigora* where a woman poisons her lover; out of costume in the second of the rehearsal scenes; and in the last sequence of the film where a male body falls down in a faint as the voice of the narrator says, ‘the girl dances for a few seconds within the circle and falls



Song of Ceylon: from the *Vertigo* sequence.

down in a faint.' The kapurala performs the exorcism ritual as a transvestite possessed by the Hindu god Skanda, and speaks as the goddess Kali in the final stages of the exorcism. The desire to dissolve the binary opposition of sexual difference is condensed into the figure of the transvestite.

The sublime (because unrepresentable) body of the film still is transformed into the ecstatic body of seizure, blinding and displacement in the tableaux. This blinding of the senses constitutes a form of negative ecstasy which reaches its nadir, not in the transcendence of a divine union, but in the return to the naturalistic, impassive body of the actor. The possibility of the non-binary body is contained within this movement towards, and falling back from, the ecstatic. It can be signified but not represented.⁹

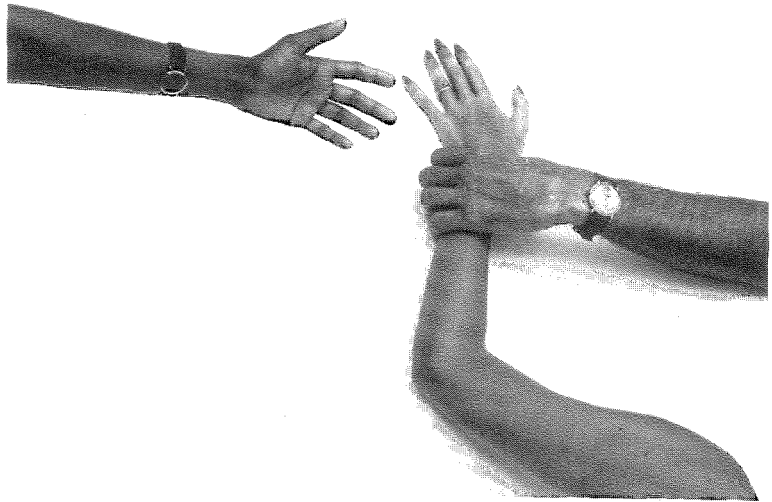
V

A Song of Ceylon departs from the idea of the pure tableau—that fragment which, like Eisenstein's pram sequence in *Battleship Potemkin*, offers itself to the fetishist. The purity of the tableaux in *A Song of Ceylon* is constantly adulterated by both the camera and those truncated arms which intervene in the image. In its most energetic movement, the camera tracks several times across the bodies of actors waiting in the wings for the performance to commence. It dissects their bodies into heads, hands, necks and feet, sweeping across them, each time to be brought to an abrupt halt by the curtain which divides the actors from the audience.

The camera frames the action so that most gestures occur at the extreme edges of the frame. It pans across white or black space to

⁹ See Anne Freadman's account of the distinctions between (1) theories of representation and theories of signification; and (2) representation and signification versus reference, in 'Taking Things Literally (Sins of My Old Age)', *Southern Review* 18, July 1985, esp. pp 167-174.

discover an arm, a prostrate body, a hand manipulating a face, a body shielding another. It holds still on a fully-fledged scene only to have its composition rearranged by insistent hands, appearing from off-screen space. This rhythmic relation between camera movement and manual gestures, constitutes a logic of movement in the film which deftly places the vexed question of gendered bodies to one side. To return to the figure of the transvestite for a moment, the logic of the film leads to the conclusion that it is gesture rather than gender that is at stake. The trajectory of the transvestite figure is intelligible only in the repetition of the gesture of falling: into the arms of the beholder in the *Vertigo* scene, into the white space of the *mise-en-scène* in the drinking sequence, and into the circle which marks the place of the dis-possessed in the final sequence. Each gesture of falling is accompanied by the opening or closing of eyes. In the last fall, into the circle which marks the return to the naturalistic body, the eyes open and rest, losing the fixed stare or the glazed look of the previous manifestations of possession. Nowhere in this schema of gestures is there a place for the problem of the transvestite's appropriation of the masquerade of femininity for its own ends. The fragmentation of the body into gestures (including extreme stillness) precludes the possibility of an unadulterated spectacle composed according to the law of sexual difference.



Song of Ceylon: from
the *Married Woman*
sequence.

The scene may well be confused – but the soundtrack knows its narrative duty from the outset. It moves in two directions: towards the image which it threatens to annihilate by rendering the *mise-en-scène* unbearably significant, and away from the space of the scene to a kind of *mise-en-abîme* of narrative diegesis. It is this movement between absence (where is Ceylon?) and presence (the displaced post-colonial Asians in the chamber music and family portrait sequences) which disavows any attempt to think the film in terms of a recovery of a pristine cultural identity. It is in the restrained intensity of the musical sequences that the soundtrack threatens to overload the image. Music works with the richness of colour and lighting to produce an effect of e-motion, of being moved. The resonance of these sequences can, in part, be attributed to the cultural hybridisation which is evident in the ethnography of the voices and the diversity of musical influences. When Ted Colless (art critic) carries Juan Davila (artist known for his reversed *Pietas*, among other works) out of the bay to the accompaniment of an aria sung to the priestess from Bizet's opera *The Pearl Fishers*, the effect is not merely comic. The scene becomes displaced into a register of excess which cannot be integrated into the narrative. Similarly, the last sequence of the film mixes the following sources: a tap-dance performed on a wooden chair to King Sunnyade's *African Juju* played on a ghetto-blaster; a fragment of a Sinhalese folk opera; a liturgical drama *The Sad Life of the Body*, sung in Spanish, accompanied by Sinhalese drums which beat slowly to a halt, leaving the voice to carry on its lament into the credit sequence of this Australian film of a Sri Lankan text available to the filmmaker only in English.

This proliferation of influences signals the impossibility of recovering an authentic cultural identity. It is only at the level of the exorcism ritual that a kind of cultural specificity emerges, but it emerges at a great distance from the spectacle of the image track. I have already asserted that the role of the verbal in this film is not to anchor the meaning of the visual. Neither can the image be considered the ventriloquist's dummy, gamely displaying that which cannot be spoken by the ventriloquist. The relation between sound and image is mostly arbitrary, sometimes oblique (as in the performance of some gestures – shaking, shivering, dancing, circling), and always displaced. The sound never seems to emanate from the image, even in the chamber music sequence where a piano, a harpsichord and two voices perform Schubert's *Litany for All Souls Day*: the lips are out of synch; the camera rests on the piano while the harpsichord is played, and the camera moves back and forth between the two spaces of performance.

A Song of Ceylon moves the voices further away from the image than does *India Song*, whose voices seem to belong to bodies which are invisible witnesses to the scenes on the image track. The voices of *A Song of Ceylon* are bodiless, insofar as they do not belong to characters who

¹⁰ Laleen Jayamanne, 'To Render the Body Ecstatic', interview with Anna Rodrigo, *Fade to Black*, Sydney College of the Arts Film Group, 1985.

'see' the image. These voices perform the text, using the voice as an instrument of the discursive and the non-discursive (hooting, laughter, exclamation, hissing). Never, at any point, do they acknowledge the image, although the image sometimes acknowledges the voices. These moments occur after the bodies have returned from their ecstatic states. In the second of the rehearsal sequences discussed above, the heads of the actors turn towards the upper left-hand corner of the frame, as if to seek out the source of the voices. At this moment the actors verge on becoming characters.

The most unsettling aspect of the narrative is its vividness which is almost invisible. Yet its invisibility, its sourcelessness, produces an uncanny place from which the ritual is performed. The narrative fulfils its destiny when the priest compels the demons to swear to depart from Somawathi's mortal body. The exorcism is dependent on the performance of this oath, making the voice essential to the ritual in a way that the body is not. This lucid space of the invisible creates a tension in the film between the comprehensibility of the ritual and the indeterminacy of the visual.

A Song of Ceylon reaches the limit of this separation between the voice and the body in relation to narrative. Dis-integration of the image track occurs at the cost of narrative prodigality.¹⁰ The radical separation of narrative and spectacle entails a blockage in the mechanism which generates plots and sub-plots, at least as far as the image is concerned. Without characters to carry the action, and lines of causality to proliferate sub-plots, the image remains diffuse and, at the same time, constrained by an intensity of *mise-en-scène* that finds no outlet through action.

VII

Emphatically, after they leave this body you will see how it truly looks. Watch these things with pleasure and expectation.

—The priest to the cult audience on completion of the exorcism ritual

These final words of the exorcism ritual contain a peculiar irony for the cinema audience, because, of course, we will never see 'how it [the body] truly looks'. It is this loss that imbues the film with a poignancy which emerges most fully in the sequence where a woman watches her video image drift slowly off screen while we listen to two voices sing *The Sad Life of the Body*. One—attribution to the video image—is stuck in the throat, sung 'at half voice'. The other—coming from nowhere—is full-bodied. The video image seems to work its way out of the frame into the black void from which the voices come. As Walter Benjamin put it so succinctly:

*"The feeling of strangeness that overcomes the actor before the camera . . . is basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one's own image in the mirror. But now the reflected image has become separable, transportable. And where does it go? Before the public."*¹¹

The final nexus of movements to which I want to draw attention is that between the cinematic body, the transportable image, and the theatrical body. The influence of postmodern redefinitions of dance to include all kinds of everyday movements as well as different sizes and shapes of bodies, is evident in the film, particularly in the use of body weight to generate movement. But it is the influence of puppet theatre that is most relevant to the manipulation of bodily and vocal gestures in the film. This tradition is evident in the separation of body and voice, in the use of assistants to manipulate limbs, in the motif of the Sinnhalese drums which punctuate the narrative, and in the voice of the narrator who reads from the text. The tracing of precise gestures on and with the body produces something akin to grace under pressure (the pressure of the sensuous *mise-en-scène* against the void of the eloquent *mise-en-abîme*) which comes from an interest in working with the body 'as both writing implement and surface'¹² to this end:

*Your painted tear drop does not draw tears from my eyes in the way glycerine induced tears do sometimes in the cinema. But I prefer the sign, the shape of sorrow, to the obscenity of its simulation. For it leaves me room for my own.*¹³

The film not only borrows gestures from the theatre. It tries to set up a cinematic relation to the space of the proscenium theatre where the central tableaux of the film are staged. There is a sustained attempt throughout the film to set up exchanges: between the three-dimensional space of the stage and the two-dimensionality of film; between bodies that perform for a mechanical apparatus and those which perform live to an audience; and between the abstract shadow and light of the projected body and the corporeal presence of the performers on stage.

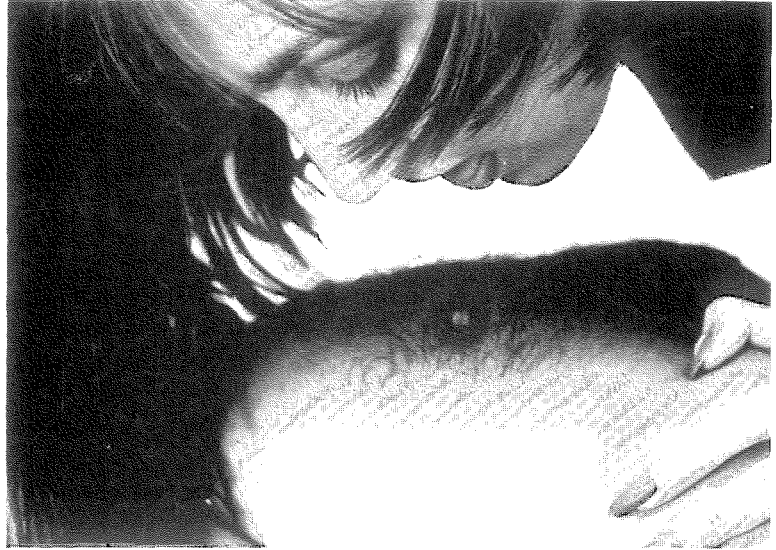
At every point in the film the cinematic space triumphs over the theatrical—for obvious reasons. But this falling back in the face of a projected move is symptomatic of the film. For instance, considerable energy is devoted to the establishment of the proscenium theatre at the beginning of the film with shots of curtains, the staging, props being positioned by stagehands, and the actors and crew waiting in the wings. Yet the moment the film cuts from this staging of the theatrical to the first of the film still tableaux—the black and white sequence based on *A Married Woman*—the cinematographic codes obliterate all reference to the theatrical space that has just been established. Although shots of the theatre lights and painted backdrop are cut into this black and white sequence, they are too fleeting to produce any sense of an exchange between the theatrical and the cinematic.

¹¹ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in James Curran et al (eds), *Mass Communication and Society*, London, Open University Press, 1977, p 397.

¹² Jodi Brooks, quoted in Laleen Jayamanne, 'A Song of Ceylon', *Cantrills Filmnotes* nos 47-48, p 7.

¹³ Laleen Jayamanne, *ibid*, p 7.

Song of Ceylon: from the *Married Woman* sequence.



VIII

It is this inhibition on the film's movements that enables the discovery of 'a certain hesitation, a stillness where it is possible to rediscover the pleasure of the spectacle'¹⁴. Yet it is the predominance of this very stillness that prevents the film from making the narrative moves that the overburdened images strain towards.

If I hesitate, in conclusion, to make any grand claims for the film, that is because I want to convey a sense of its suggestive desire for an exchange between theatre and cinema that would approximate to a cinema of cruelty:

*Artaud's signalling through the flames to Falconetti's Joan burning at the stake for the sake of the voices she hears in Dreyer's **Passion of Joan of Arc** is a great moment of cinema for it regenerated theatre. It is this image that Artaud metaphorised as the emblematic gesture of his theatre of cruelty, theatre as an act of signalling through the flames, burning at the stake, the passionate intensity of a gestural theatre always imagined and longed for but rarely experienced in the theatre today.*¹⁵

¹⁴ Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative distribution leaflet, op cit.

¹⁵ Laleen Jayamanne interviewed by Rex Butler, 'Speaking of Ceylon', *Frogger*, 1985.

It is the desire for this cinema of gesturality that has sustained the investigation of *A Song of Ceylon* into that prohibited pleasure of the spectacle. Perhaps the film's difficulty in sustaining the exchange between spectacle and narrative, the theatrical and the cinematic, is one

measure of the constraints upon an ecstatic move into another time frame, another condition of knowledge.

A Song of Ceylon was shot on Super 8 and blown up to 16mm.

Director: Laleen Jayamanne

Producer: Adrienne Parr

Screenplay: Laleen Jayamanne (adapted from an anthropological text)

Cinematography: Gabrielle Finnane, Anne Rutherford, Andrew Plain

Editing: Geoff Weary, Laleen Jayamanne

Art Director: Sheona White

Sound Mix: Geoff Stitt, Adrienne Parr, Andrew Plain

Still Photography: Geoff Weary

UK distributor: Australian Film Commission, Victory House, 99-101 Regent Street, London W1.

2

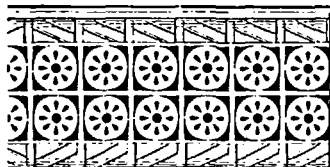
NOVELS TOLD
IN WOODCUTS



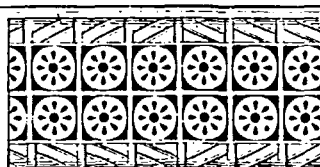
"..... so compelling,
so deeply felt,
so rich in ideas,
that one never tires
of looking at them."

Thomas Mann

FRANS MASERIEEL



FIRST U.K. EDITION
published by
THE REDSTONE PRESS
price £9.95



STORY & *the* ***IDEA***
WITHOUT WORDS

Available from good bookshops or direct from:
The Redstone Press, 21 Colville Terrace, W11 2BU

'DIFFERENCE' AND DEFERENCE

BY AIMEE RANKIN

We can assume that all cultural practice is founded on certain assumptions, whether it articulates them in theoretical terms or not. The exhibition of recent British and American work, *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts and the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York¹, marks an interesting and unusual attempt to question through art the set of assumptions inherent in the complex nexus of representation and sexual difference. Instead of following the usual curatorial format whereby the art work, available for a plurality of readings, lends itself to a particular critical interpretation, the work in the *Difference* show foregrounds the basis of its practice in explicitly 'theoretical' terms, purposefully addressing the debates which have preoccupied academic circles, and, finally, blurring the distinctions that are typically made between 'theory' and 'art'. No longer simply self-referential, content to emphasise through its process the 'expression' of an unchallenged individual subjectivity, this work expands its field to examine the representational processes of culture whereby that very subjectivity is organised. That the result of this endeavour is of mixed success is due in part to its specific readings of that determining theory, which the art work may well exceed, or unfortunately, fall short of, but rarely equals in its own material depth and complexity.

The theory that seems most at stake in this context is one which traces the problematic construction of human sexual identity: psychoanalysis, most notably the

poststructuralist re-reading of Freud provided by the late French analyst, Jacques Lacan.

Appropriated by feminists precisely because it could account for the cultural production of sexual difference without recourse to a pre-given, 'natural' or essential conception of femininity (which would, it seemed, relegate women to the certainties of their existing position), this psychoanalytic enquiry has, particularly in Britain and France in the past decade, marked a major turning point in the feminist movement's conception of its own struggle. Not satisfied simply to legislate for 'equal rights' in the workplace, or to celebrate the stereotypical virtues of a primordial feminine 'essence' in their art, feminists in the mid-'70s began to examine the ways in which sexual difference was already inscribed in the ideological systems of representation and discourse, in ways which inevitably sabotaged their attempts to provide a positive re-evaluation of women's cultural role. The work in the *Difference* show, although not necessarily claiming a direct link to feminist movement politics, is nonetheless made possible by this interrogation, and should thus be read as one aspect of this feminist project.

The psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, with its insistence on the subject's entry into

¹ *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* was exhibited at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, December 8-February 10, 1985; the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, Illinois, March 3-April 7, 1985; and London's Institute of Contemporary Arts, July 19-September 1, 1985.

92 language as founding moment in the assumption of sexual identity, was of primary importance to this critical investigation. According to Lacan, 'Any speaking being whatsoever must line up on one or the other side of this divide', illustrated in his diagram by two washroom doors, one entitled 'Ladies' and the other, 'Gentlemen'.² The inference, of course, is that we must all learn which is the correct door to use. Thus the symbolic order which the speaking subject enters into already embodies the cultural values ascribed to sexual difference, which are contingently mapped over the shifting and uncertain series of identifications which actually position each individual. 'The subject is the subject of speech... and subject to that order.'³ Lacan's crucial argument is that this order is itself phallogentric, constructed according to the terms of a binary opposition which, in patriarchal society, privileges the *phallus* as signifier (at the expense, of course, of the feminine, which comes to signify, simply, its 'lack'). It is this ordering of meaning, through which 'woman' is defined as the negative of 'man', that feminists have attempted to analyse, and ultimately, to negate.

Psychoanalysis charts in its case studies the precarious and unstable resolution of sexual identity in patriarchal culture; and its study documents the difficult nature of that seemingly untenable position for *women*. It is this polemical impasse in which feminist theorists situate themselves today: attempting to foment a crisis in the terms of meaning which have defined their very existence, in an effort to topple the system of representations that they are also subject to. It is the problematic nature of this ambitious undertaking which accounts for the brilliance of the work in this show, and also for its potential failure, since it is bound up in a struggle to articulate a splitting of subjectivity which would threaten at every point the processes of its own perception and sense. For how can one challenge terms of representation from within its very practice? How can 'alternative' or 'oppositional' meanings be articulated, except through existing discourses, which already embody in their structuring principles the ideological reproduction of the culture they serve? Possibly, it has been argued, by driving a critical wedge into the poorly concealed cracks at the base of this symbolic edifice, exposing, through the

conscious and unconscious workings of a subjectivity necessarily *split* in its relation to that edifice (Oedipus?) the *difference* which it attempts, with only partial success, to repress.

The work in the *Difference* show charts the terrain of this radical strategy in the visual arts. But this approach, made possible by the complex formulations of psychoanalytic theory, is also potentially subverted by the perhaps unintentional erection of the imposing facade of that critical discourse itself. For psychoanalytic theory, especially as practiced by Lacan, has ramifications which are quite contradictory to this feminist intent. The ahistorical processes of subjectivity that it describes would seem to allow no conceivable alternative to the inevitable continuation of the patriarchal, phallogentric order whose mythic origins it has so eloquently traced. On another level, Lacan's work has itself been criticised for being yet another example of this phallogentric discourse, the *authority* of his theoretical text mapped over his arrogant, flamboyant style and position of institutional power. Although these criticisms are well founded, a closer reading of his work makes apparent certain strategies by which he attempted to undercut the effect of his own mastery: what are usually characterised as the 'frustrating' aspects of his discourse, with its odd parapraxes, inexplicable tangents, punning word games, and general air of irreverence, may be better understood in this sense. But it is this very irreverence, that refusal to comply absolutely with the terms of symbolic articulation, which is sadly missing from much of the work in this show, whose deadly serious rigour, for some approaching *rigor mortis*, foregrounds not difference, but *deference*.

Of the show's ten participants, the British photographer Victor Burgin indicts himself most notably in this respect, and his influential practice illustrates in exemplary fashion some of the problems involved in this theoretical approach to art. Focusing on the representation of Woman as erotic spectacle, Burgin stages

² Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, cited by Jacqueline Rose, 'Introduction II', in Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds), *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*, London, Macmillan, 1982, p 42.

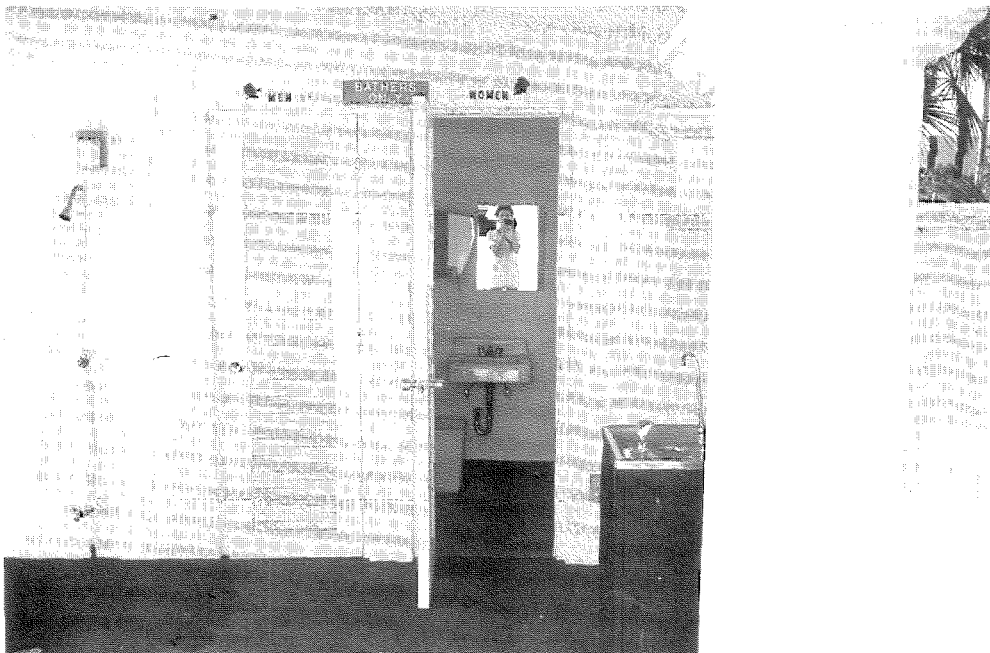
³ Jacqueline Rose, *ibid*, p 31.

beautifully fabricated scenarios in a fragmented neo-narrative culled from the footnotes of contemporary theory. Consisting of sequentially arranged black and white photographic images with pseudo-‘poetic’ written captions, Burgin’s work *literally poses* questions which have been sketched elsewhere in theoretical terms; these texts become the scripts which Burgin as ‘director’ fleshes out in the *mise-en-scène* of his photography. Thus his work images a play of associations not of the subjective unconscious, but in the terms of the theoretisation of that subjectivity, citing the work of such formidable masters as Freud, Lacan, Foucault, Shakespeare, Manet and Hitchcock to authorise its illustrative practice. In reading this work, the viewer is expected to note the impressive range of Burgin’s facility, and breadth of critical research, in what amounts to a visually evocative book report in rebus form, whose halting, tentatively worded captions read like poststructuralist crib notes.

One of the positive arguments which has been made for his work in this regard is that it has an important pedagogic function, elucidating in highly seductive visual terms academic debates which are otherwise considered too dense or

difficult for a larger audience. However, I cannot agree that Burgin is attempting a popularisation of these concepts, since they exist in his work only as obscure references to nudge the recognition of an already initiated critical spectator. Instead, by presenting a pleurably palatable, safely orthodox adaptation of theoretical material which has already gained a high level of academic currency, Burgin may be hiding behind the fashionable mask of ‘appropriation’ to justify what, in the end, still resembles plagiarism.

In one example, Burgin has photographed a set of washroom doors supposedly analogous to the Lacanian diagram described earlier; except that, in his version, the door to the Ladies Room is opened, and the mirror inside reflects a partial self-portrait, his face masked by the camera which records the scene. This telling image may provide a key to his entire critical practice, revealing as it does his desire to insert *himself* into the body of thought he masterfully appropriates. That Burgin has, as voyeur, opened the door in this picture to that which constitutes ‘the feminine’, in order to frame with the objectifying apparatus of his camera this



Detail from *Olympia* by Victor Burgin.

94 fascinating image, provides for the other frequent criticism of his work: its insistent reiteration of the fetishistic representations of women which feminist practice has attempted to resist. His intended 'concessions' to feminism in this respect, which prompt him, for example, to avert the risks of titillation in his re-staging of Manet's *Olympia* by covering the naked breasts of his model with an undershirt, remain wholly ineffectual; in this case backfiring in an unintended evocation of a kitsch advertisement for Calvin Klein.

Moreover, artists such as Burgin, who make use of impressive theoretical arguments to legitimate their own practice, inevitably seem to present these discourses in the conventional terms of their ideological mastery. Employing theory in their work as seamless, authorial truth, they enhance the mystification of the powerful discourses they reverently mime, in effect overturning the force of the critical 'interrogation' they purportedly intend. At the same time, this inexactly rendered illustration of these concepts often re-presents a reductive, dryly academic reading of their subtle and complicated play, for this reason, seeming actually *less* critically pleasurable than the original sources themselves.

Fortunately, a more sophisticated and, ultimately, more successful set of tactics is articulated in the work of Mary Kelly, the British feminist artist who has perhaps proven to be the most important and influential proponent of the diverse and loosely defined 'movement' that the *Difference* show represents. Her work, which also takes its impetus from contemporary theory, works along *with* it in a parallel investigation of remarkable conceptual depth and complexity. Not simply 'appropriating' these theoretical formulations, Kelly advances them with intelligence and clarity in the material terms of her practice, illustrating therein not only the theories themselves, but also the points of their resistance and insufficiency. Analysing 'the continuous production of difference through systems of representation', her work stages a layered dialogue of diverse ideological discourses in a calculated attempt to trace the contradictory fluctuations of a 'body in trouble with language', in the ambivalent relations of a subjectivity irrevocably bound by the cultural order in which it finds its voice. Pitting these discourses subtly

against one another, in a reciprocal interrogation of the personal by the theoretical and the theoretical by the personal, Kelly diffuses their cohesive ideological effect, invoking thereby that *difference* which each is determined to repress. The narration of personal experience, which has a privileged relation in both the feminist movement and the history of psychoanalysis, is thus a crucial component of Kelly's work. In it, however, the 'personal' emerges, not as the uncritical reflection of an already fixed subjective identity, but rather, as the very site of difficulty in that subjectivity's ongoing cultural construction.

In her massive, six-year project, the *Post-Partum Document*, Kelly chronicles several important stages in the growth and development of her infant son, plotting the mythic formulations of psychoanalytic theory over the mundane details of everyday life. Consisting of a series of mnemonic objects which embody traces of her son's physical presence (stained diapers, crayoned scribbles, fragments of blanket, and other 'little keepsakes'), written over with an astonishing array of clinical notations, diary fragments, critical comments, and scientific diagrams, this work poignantly outlines the movement of her own desire in the complex social and psychological process of maternity. One of the most interesting aspects of this work is the tension that is thereby exposed between the 'cultural production of sexed subjectivity' and the actual *bodies* which are always at stake in this process. This is eloquently made apparent in the expressive objects supplied by her son, whose exuberant, polymorphous physical vitality is progressively channelled into the rigid systems of representation which comprise the symbolic order. It is this loss of her child as object, a necessary consequence of the processes of subjectivity that she records, and the price of her construction therein as Mother, which emerges in this work as Kelly's own melancholic struggle, as she relinquishes her child to that order of culture which already holds the limiting definitions of them both.

Unfortunately, the *Difference* show was only able to present an excerpt of this remarkable project, which should be seen in its entirety to appreciate its impressive scope. In addition, Kelly previewed several new works from her series in progress, *Interim*, on women and middle

age. These combine large black and white photographic images on glass of emblematic articles of her own clothing, with wittily evocative hand written excerpts of dialogue and inner speech. Quite different in appearance and effect from the *Post-Partum Document*, this new work signals a major shift by Kelly, who seems to have abandoned some of the more complex material aspects of her earlier work in favour of a format more closely approximating other works in this show. However, as with the *Document*, it is difficult to gauge accurately the full effect of this new work without seeing the project in its entirety.

defined as the quintessential object of the look in existing structures of spectatorship (which have been theorised in psychoanalytic terms by feminists such as Laura Mulvey), confront the viewer of Kolbowski's work with an effectively ambiguous re-enactment of the visual pleasures they supposedly provide. Several psychoanalytic theories have argued for the privileged importance of narcissism in the make-up of feminine sexuality; and it is thus probably no accident that the most seductive and glamorous images of women are found primarily in women's magazines. In her critical use of these fascinating pictures, Kolbowski foregrounds the



Model Pleasure, Part 5, by Silvia Kolbowski.

In a completely different fashion, Silvia Kolbowski's wittily juxtaposed arrangements of photographs 'appropriated' from the glossy pages of high fashion magazines and the pulp spreads of popular advertising comprise the most promising American contribution to this debate. This provocative and amusing work, which has yet to receive the critical attention that it deserves, analyses the problematic cultural construction of Woman as spectacle in its larger study of the fetishistic nature of visual representation. Images of beautiful women,

difficult attempt to situate a form of feminine spectatorship which has thus far remained an enigmatic *oversight* in current feminist theories.

Hinting not too subtly at the notion of 'masquerade' suggested by psychoanalysts such as Jacques Lacan⁴ and Joan Rivière⁵ in their

⁴ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, London, Hogarth Press, 1977, p 107.

⁵ Joan Rivière, 'Womanliness as Masquerade', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, X, 1929, pp 303-13. Reprinted in Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (eds), *Formations of Fantasy*, London, Methuen, 1986, pp 35-44.

accounts of sexual identity (and of feminine sexuality in particular), Kolbowski has chosen specifically those glamorous images which play upon the face as mask, its features outlined in evident exaggeration, or, in some cases, obscured behind the decorative latticework of a veil. These beautifully seductive images collide in her work with the stereotypically tacky graphics of product advertising, which serve as blatant metaphors for the visual consumption which is (invisibly?) taking place. Kolbowski thus makes the spectator see the 'appetites of the eye'⁶ that visual representations are manipulatively gauged to feed, producing in the process a form of pleasure that is both amusing and critical.

Foregrounding language in a similar approach, the visually arresting work of Barbara Kruger effectively exposes the political underpinnings of representational practice in not too polite terms. In the format of an elegant superimposition of the constructivist propaganda poster and the slick paste-up layouts of *Vogue*, Kruger addresses



Now You See Us... by Barbara Kruger.

the spectator directly in the almost accusatory tone of her accompanying texts⁷. Through the use of linguistic 'shifters' (I, you, we, they, etc), she cleverly disrupts the processes of identification underpinning existing structures of spectatorship, making the viewer uncomfortably aware of his or her sexually determined position in relation to these highly charged, emphatically feminist statements. Kruger thus works to reveal the 'little man behind the curtain' in a significant exposé of the structures of reading that are ordinarily transparent in visual representations.

A more problematic attempt in this vein is that undertaken by Sherrie Levine, in her appropriative re-presentation of the work of several famous male artists. Although a questionable inclusion in the *Difference* show because of her inexact relation to its determining theoretical premise, Levine's work does in fact operate to resist and displace the notion of authority which is at stake in phallogocentric discourse, remarking in this context its status as fraud. In fact, her work may stand in an insidious fashion as the most successful example of the concept of masquerade in this show, for in it she has entirely dispersed the relation of her own expressive identity. There is no apparent trace in Levine's work of the processes by which her own subjectivity is organised: in it she exists only as a *tabula rasa*, a blank screen upon which is projected the unaltered drama of another's expressive practice: in this case, a series of artist's self-portraits. This initially amusing and subversive form of petty larceny, which Levine continues to repeat, has lost much of its original critical punch; and she now appears to have painted herself into a narrowly cynical corner. Although Levine may be one of the few participants in the contemporary scene with an evident sense of humour, it seems that she knows only one joke, which she obsessively retells in endless variations until it becomes simply another form of bombast.

In this respect, Levine's work points out the potential limitations of the postmodernist

⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, op cit, p 115.

⁷ See Barbara Kruger, ' "Taking" Pictures', *Screen* July-August 1982, vol 23 no 2, pp 90-96.

strategy of appropriation which is currently so much in vogue, and which inflects in some sense all of the works in this show. Artists involved in this type of practice often seem to feel that it is enough of a cultural critique simply to alter the physical context of the appropriated representational content, through a somewhat reductive exercise of 're-framing'. This new context reportedly foregrounds the previously unnoticed ideological operations of that material content, in a critically deconstructive deployment of its force. Yet appropriation is not a critique of the cultural system of representation; it is how

that system operates. Artists who appropriate the actual images or style of advertising, for example, mimic responsively only that movement by which advertising itself reappropriates the potentially disruptive and oppositional cultural forms developed by artists and other socially marginalised groups. In the end, as Levine's work shows, this repetitive and retaliatory gesture of re-framing does not in itself sufficiently disrupt the powerful ideological effects of these representations; in fact, it may remain surreptitiously dependent on their continued operative force for its own critical and

97



After Alexander Rodchenko by Sherrie Levine.

Although irreverence and irony may seem particularly apt as contemporary tactics, the existing cultural order, which oppresses *both* men and women, is really no laughing matter, as can be seen in the almost painfully sincere work of Ray Barrie. More in the lines of pathos than humour, Barrie's work raises the issue of the problematic cultural construction of masculinity that has largely been short-changed in a predominantly feminist enquiry of difference. In his series *Master/Pieces*, he alternates typically repressed representations of male tenderness and domesticity with their conventionally aggressive underside, the crudely obscene graffiti sketches found on most men's washroom walls. Instead of peeping coyly into the Ladies stall, as does Victor Burgin, and concerning himself with the problems of femininity, Barrie examines what is going on closer to home in the washroom to which language, and Lacan, has assigned him. Barrie's work thus serves to open an urgent new direction in 'feminist' research, for as Burgin himself puts it, 'there's going to be no major shift in extant social forms without a shift in the

construction of masculinity'.⁹ Hopefully feminists will recognise and encourage this difficult project, despite the potentially controversial nature of the images it may uncover.

In an attempt to engage the complex issues of sexual difference that have been sketched here in a spectrum of representational practices, this exhibition includes not only visual art, but also a substantial film and video programme¹⁰, as well as an excellent critical overview (with important essays by Craig Owens, Lisa Tickner, Jacqueline Rose, Peter Wollen and Jane Weinstock, in the accompanying catalogue¹¹). But it is the gallery

⁸ For a discussion of recent work by Silvia Kolbowski, Sherrie Levine and Barbara Kruger, see Abigail Solomon Godeau, 'Winning the Game When the Rules Have Been Changed: Art Photography and Postmodernism', *Screen* November-December 1984, vol 25 no 6, pp 88-102.

⁹ Victor Burgin, cited in Lisa Tickner, 'Sexuality and/in Representation: Five British Artists', in *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality*, New York, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984, p 20.

¹⁰ Not included in the London ICA exhibition.

¹¹ See footnote 10.



Master/Pieces by Ray Barrie.

exhibition which is the most unusual aspect of this show, and which thus demands the most critical attention, since these theoretical ideas, originally formulated in terms of the cinema by film journals such as *Screen* in the mid-'70s, and also quite familiar by now to students of comparative literature or continental philosophy, have only recently begun to trickle down into the cultural backwaters of gallery art. It is perhaps ironic that this brand of poststructuralist theory, touted as radical in an art world context, is already firmly entrenched in conservative academia, an unfortunate consequence of the art world's general resistance to any form of theorisation, and thus, relatively late entry into the arena of these debates. (Of course, this resistance still continues unabated in most sectors, where the art work is, as usual, assumed to simply 'speak for itself'.) But this may nonetheless present a problem in the appreciation of this work, either for the naive gallery viewer, completely unprepared to struggle through its somewhat academic articulations, or, at the other extreme, for the informed viewer familiar with the more sophisticated representational strategies already elucidated in this context by a whole generation of experimental film-makers, which the gallery work is only beginning to develop.

In fact, it is this important legacy of film practice which provides the most evident influence on the static work in this show, which refers not to the single, unitary object of a painting or sculpture, but rather, to the more complex *text* of a novel or film. It is surely significant that the advance guard of art works discussed in terms of these initially cinematic theories is almost exclusively photographic. Indeed, the dominant material format in the show, an ordered arrangement of mostly black and white photographic images accompanied by various forms of written texts, resembles at times a form of interrupted cinema, based on typically filmic conventions of narrative, *mise-en-scène*, and point of view. One of the most visually effective treatments in this format, the use of montage in the sequential deployment of multiple images, also takes its cue from the traditions of film editing, which have been extensively theorised in psychoanalytic terms by writers such as Stephen Heath. Although

photography may be a more convenient trajectory for these concepts than, say, painting or sculpture, it is the signal omission of what could constitute a heterogeneous material practice that is an important weakness of this show, and lends it its potentially proscriptive flavour. For any theory which aims to overthrow oppressive systems of representation should, one hopes, be open to a diversity of material policies to this end; and it is a disappointing coincidence that the various works in a show called *Difference* should look, in the end, so much the same.

This somewhat frustrating exercise of 'cinemus interruptus' brings me (somewhat inconclusively?) to the issue of pleasure. Come to think of it, as Kate Linker, curator of *Difference*, has put it, 'This show is *littered* with bodies'.¹² Yet, for all its theoretical evocation of desire, it remains surprisingly unseductive in aesthetic effect. The 'critical distance' of its interrogation is mirrored in the dry, flat and slickly packaged appearance of all of the work in this show; the bodies at stake in its formulations thus hermetically sealed in the cool textures of photographic emulsion and smooth plate glass. Actually, these images hold the viewer at arm's length as an intentional policy. One reason for this evident frigidity is the influential feminist critique of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' provided by Laura Mulvey.¹³ This attitude, laid over the North American practices of minimalist and conceptual art, has resulted in a relation to the image predicated on its virtual elimination. Yet, the excessive plenitude of the image, dangerous to women in terms of its content, is in some way also potentially dangerous to the existing order. Roland Barthes has argued that language is there to resist the polysemy of images; and it is this indeterminacy of meaning, insufficiently described by the primary linguistic readings of semiotic theory, which calls for further research.

This resistant relation of language to the fullness of the image has been literally illustrated by the steadily proliferating use of written texts in contemporary art practice. This popular

¹²Noted in an unpublished conversation.

¹³Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* Autumn 1975, vol 16 no 3, pp 6-18.

100 feminist tactic, which effectively regulates the pleasurable absorption of the spectator in the visual scene by introducing a shock-effect of distance, and inserting in that gap the readings that are to be privileged in the perception of the work, introduces its own possibly damaging repercussions. For, as much as structures of spectatorship act to position a viewer, structures of writing inevitably position a reader, a 'figure' of speech that is quietly assumed to be male. Language is not a neutral vehicle for expressing meaning; as Lacan has stated, it is through language that the laws, relations, and divisions of phallogocentric culture are symbolically erected and continuously ensured. Thus a feminist critique may have to ask itself which is more ideologically oppressive: an image constructed according to the existing principles of spectatorship, or a logical argument constructed in the language of patriarchy? Obviously, these deconstructive campaigns must be waged hand in hand; and the *Difference* show records several successful skirmishes on both strategic fronts. But, it *must* be emphasised that the implications of the structuring principles of language itself make its subversion an imperative aspect of any attempt to redefine the existing structures of social relations that it describes.

The *Difference* show represents a 'state of the art' summary of these critical debates in the field

of the visual arts. But there remains yet to be seen a coherent reconsideration of these concepts in relation to the specular concerns of the art object. Theories of spectatorship derived from the study of cinema cannot be applied without alteration to the static image, and theories of meaning developed in structural linguistics cannot be superimposed upon the picture. Yet these are the crucial questions of our own cultural moment, and their urgency will hopefully be addressed in an art practice which reflects the difficulty and complexity of these important ideas in its own material terms. There is thus a pressing need for new theories of spectatorship able to account for the diverse forms of representation which now comprise the visual arts, and for new strategies to inflect their critical play. Finally, a psychoanalytic interrogation which has primarily been concerned with the relations of the symbolic must make way for an accompanying exploration of the imaginary, and the relations of difference which determine the poetics/politics of the unconscious. The *Difference* show serves to open these debates for further visual research, underlining in its strengths and weaknesses the urgency of its cultural critique.

This article originally appeared in the Winter 1985 issue of *Art-Network* (Sydney, Australia).

CALL FOR PAPERS

SCREEN: Women's Cinema/s in Context

Articles examining practices of production, distribution and exhibition within different national and industrial contexts are sought to highlight the importance of cultural specificity and the range of determinants that bear on the widely varying products encompassed by often falsely unified notions of women's cinema. Under the combined influence of psychoanalysis and the puritanism of '70s feminism, feminist theory has been directed into an increasingly futile pursuit of ahistorical notions of feminine specificity. At its most extreme, work of this type constructs an ethnocentric subject for women's cinema. In abdicating from history, it fails to produce practical interventionist strategies. In 'outlawing' certain forms of visual pleasure it blocks attempts to theorise a 'politics of the unconscious'.

While women's festivals and organisations continue to operate within apparently unified notions of 'women's film culture', oppositions and tensions exist which are ultimately determined by cultural and historical contexts—for example, in the debates around the legitimacy for feminist cultural production of 'European Art Cinema' or US exploitation movies, and in questions concerning the relevance of feminist politics to the practices of 'Third Cinema'. By drawing attention to the importance of environment and practice, the issue would aim to deconstruct the spuriously universal subject of much cinefeminism, to fragment its 'same/other' bifurcation into a spectrum of heterogeneous and historically specific cultural fields.

Submissions are requested by: April 15, 1987.

Inquiries or submissions to The Editor, Screen, 29 Old Compton Street, London, W1V 5PL, England.

ON REPRESENTATION, SEXUALITY AND SAMENESS

REFLECTIONS ON THE
'DIFFERENCE' SHOW
BY MARY KELLY

I want to discuss, not difference, but 'sameness', that is, strategic sameness, a sense of political identity; always tentative, temporary, contradictory but historically motivated and ultimately just as significant in the cultural sphere as it is in any other. The importance of the *Difference* show, for me, is that it establishes, in spite of the diversity of work it includes, a certain unity, an alliance that refuses to play out the postmodernist scenario for this genre of group/theme show, namely, pluralism. Instead, the exhibition takes up, via Kate Linker's curatorship, a position within that plurality of styles and argues for an art practice which responds to social as well as aesthetic imperatives in the process of rejecting the so-called avant-garde of the '70s. It also refuses the modernist definition of art according to media and creates identity across those categories on the basis of shared ideas.

In this respect, the film and video contribution is central¹. It is necessary in order to understand the way two histories, one in fine art – the critique of authorship and concern for social purpose (Hans Haacke) – and the other in film – the introduction of psychoanalytic theory and the emphasis on spectatorship (Godard) – produce the visual hybrid which is characteristic of the more recent static work (Barbara Kruger, Silvia Kolbowski, Marie Yates, Yve Lomax as well as my own). Here, at the most obvious level, there is similarity of purpose in which narrative, or at least seriality breaks

down modernism's holy paradigm: the single, essentially expressive and preferably non-discursive picture. (The kind that proliferate, for example, in the exhibition *Zeitgeist*). The importance of any didactic emphasis in the context of exhibiting, which is fundamentally part of the entertainment business, should not be underestimated. I maintain then, that underlying the controversial response to the *Difference* show, particularly in New York where it was extensively reviewed, is a certain fear of sameness. This takes, primarily, three forms.

First, the look of sameness: conceptual, dull, difficult, out-of-date, not new and different; such arguments, based on the notion that one historical style displaces another, are always precarious because the scene shifts so quickly. For instance, an article in a recent issue of a leading art magazine states that the '80s are over and the craze for pictures is already subsiding. There is, however, another objection, related to this, but more insidious, which says, basically, 'it isn't English'; meaning the Germans and Italians paint and the English make objects. Promoting an often regressive nationalism has been the European art market's solution to the economic slump of the '70s (*Documenta*). On the contrary, one of the *Difference* exhibition's strengths in bringing together British and North American

¹ However, the film and video contributions to the New York *Difference* exhibition were not included in London.

artists has been to consolidate the history of critical work on sexuality. But I am also thinking of its contribution to a wider context, one defined by Hal Foster in *The Anti-Aesthetic*² as cross-disciplinary practices, engaged in a politic or rooted in a vernacular that form the basis for a 'postmodernism of resistance'.

Second, theoretical disagreements that either emphasise the institution, museum or gallery, as a primary target for debate or insist upon an equal rights strategy such as the promotion of all women artists: these are, at best, refusals of feminism and its political implications in the '80s. At worst, they are invocations, not for difference, but for being different: my position, my work – a policy of non-alignment disguised as integrity.

Third, an argument I take more seriously, one made possible precisely because of what I call the exhibition's sameness, the fact that it doesn't focus on a plurality of styles, theoretical positions, or national peculiarities. Nor does it reduce sexuality to a diversity of sexual practices or to a sex war, that is, a struggle between real men and women which could only be resolved by separation, assertions of difference or, perhaps, a women's show. In contrast, the *Difference* exhibition focuses on the construction of our sexual identities as men and women; always remembering it does this in ways which are specific to visual representations or imaged discourse, not literal debate. In doing this, the works embrace, rework or at least invite the psychoanalytic definitions of masculinity and femininity. For both Freud and Lacan, the concept of bisexuality is crucial to understanding the tentative nature of sexual positioning, that is, understanding the drives in terms of aims and objects rather than predetermined sexual instincts. By emphasising too the polymorphous perversity of the drives, the way is opened for reconsidering notions of perversion and repression which do not simply reinforce conventional definitions of active/male, passive/female, and, most importantly, for raising the question of homosexual object choice. And this is the basis of the third objection: that the exhibition does not adequately address this difference.

Here, in another way, the exhibition provokes a fear of sameness; fear of the loss of sexual

identity and consequently, of social division and political cause. This, I believe, is a very productive moment in the debate around the issues the exhibition claims to deal with. The argument seems to evolve, very schematically, in the following way. Initially, around the most recent term in this debate – masculinity. It is said that there is an attempt in certain work (Victor Burgin, Jeff Wall) to create a literal symmetry with the feminine term, suggesting, for instance, that if 'the woman' doesn't exist, then neither does 'the man', refusing the universal fact and identifying with the fictitious other. Such a simple assimilation of the privileged into the ranks of 'the oppressed' is short-circuited because the oppressed cannot be homogenised in a strategic sense, as a class, any more than 'the other' can be defined, in linguistic terms, as a specific category. In another way, too, it is suggested that when men concern themselves with male fantasy or with solving the enigma of femininity it may just be another excuse for looking at women. Some work, however (Ray Barrie, Stuart Marshall), does address the relevant problem of power relations between and among men, exploring what Lacan has called 'the fraud of the phallus'. But more often, the defence against sameness is to make the issue of masculinity synonymous with homosexuality.

Clearly this is also reductive, but I think there is more at stake here than just redefining the feminine term. In the process of re-establishing a social and political identity based on sexual object choice, this argument does transcend the usual dichotomy men/women. At one level, it demands analyses of the effects – medical, legal, etc – of the heterosexual imperative. At another level, it asks what it means to transgress that imperative in relation to theorising subjectivity itself. Why, for instance, is female homosexuality the repressed term in that analysis? Does this reconstitute the enigma? A symptomatic example: if the first love object is the mother and she is assumed to be a real woman, rather than a primordial object, then one explanation might be the 'naturalness' of the woman's desire for another woman, and that perversion might better

² Hal Foster (ed), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Port Townsend, Washington, Bay Press, 1983.



mk

Appel

The problem of identity after maternity: panels from *Interim* by Mary Kelly.

She glances at the menu, then at the door, intent but not impatient. "Sorry I'm late," I begin to make excuses, "Never mind, you waited last time," she embraces me, "it's good to see you." Her presence calms me as it always has, for nearly fifteen years. I ask her if that's possible. She says it must be since we met in 1968. Then we sail across the crowded harbour and cast anchor at our favourite table, our island by the window where we reminisce, then plan. Do the translation, exchange the manuscripts, write the article, promote the project, her project, my project, our intervention. But first we order two hors d'oeuvres and savour compliments about our clothes, our hair, then launch complaints about our lovers, then, the men, incomprehending others on the mainland, distant, unpredictable, piling to insignificance against our monument - unending friendship. After that, as usual we share one dessert, have many cups of coffee and give good advice. "I'll tell you something if you promise not to say a word to anyone," she looks elated. "So you've finally found the right one?" "Don't be cynical, I can't help thinking that there must be something better, something more." "And is there?" "Yes and no, but now I don't know what to do." "Because he's married?" "Mmm." I tell her to forget it, stop procrastinating, finish the book. "The problem is, you have a Don Juan complex." "Don Juanita," she corrects me and we laugh. Same familiar conversation, same delicious laughter. She goes on, "Don't you ever wonder what you're missing?" "Yes, but work is all that matters at the moment." "Well, a change might help." "The only change I need is time to do it." "Then, stop teaching." Seems so easy, so convincing when she says it. "And the money?" "Let him make it for awhile." Absurd idea, but still, I want to hear it. They are closing, asking us to leave. The light is almost gone. Somehow the island now looks greener, fresher, but the seagulls sound more mournful. I protest, "We've just begun." The manuscript, the article, the buried treasure. "Next time," we both agree. I take her arm and then look back, everything two girls could long for - a boat, a cave, a castle and someone else to do the cooking. "Could there ever be another place as wonderful as this?" "Of course not," she replies.

describe her sexual relationship with a man. But this is obviously problematic since, conversely, it would be implying that a man's sexual relationship with a woman is primary and his desire for men 'perverse'. What I am suggesting is that feminism may have privileged the relation to the mother's body in a way which did more than explain a different relation to castration; it also asserted our difference from men. Perhaps in the process we made the mother too real, too close, and consequently blamed her for too much.

At this point, we might ask, is there no outcome of the Oedipus complex for the girl which is without neurotic consequences? Does, for instance, as Catherine Millot suggests in 'The Feminine Super-Ego', the pre-Oedipal identification with the father always entail a regressive transference of the demand for the phallus from him to the pre-Oedipal, hence phallic, mother?³ Is it inconceivable that the 'masculinity complex' be considered, in some sense at least, as a resolution of the conflict? It does, after all, necessitate the internalisation of demand and the setting up of a super-ego. This process can lead to inhibition and anxiety, as Millot indicates, but at the same time it makes possible what is generally referred to as a profession, or less mundanely, as the kind of sublimated pleasure associated with creative work. And significantly, it is for this manifestation of 'virility' that women propose to make themselves lovable. As Millot points out, 'the object of desire—and not the object of love—is feminine'. I find this an intriguing distinction, one that seems to underline the particular dilemma of the older woman: how to represent her femininity, her sexuality, her desire when she is no longer seen to be desirable. She can neither look forward, as a young girl does, to being a woman, having the fantasised body of maturity nor can she return to the ideal moment of maternity—ideal in that it allows her to occupy the position of the actively desiring subject without transgressing the socially acceptable definition of the woman as mother. Rather, she is looking back, at something lost—acknowledging, perhaps, that 'being a woman' was only a brief moment in her life?

In *Post-Partum Document*⁴ I asked myself what it was that the woman feared losing beyond the

pleasure of the child's body and concluded that it was the closeness to the mother's body she experienced in being 'like her'. Now, in *Interim*, I am asking how the woman can reconstitute her narcissistic aim, and consequently her pleasure, her desire, outside of that maternal relation.

Significantly, the stories in Part I begin with the decision not to have a child and then continue to explore other forms of identification around which the feminine/masculine terms revolve. In effect, *Corpus* reiterates the hysteric's question: am I a man or am I a woman? So, with the loss of maternal identity, I feel that a different order of fear emerges. And this, once again, concerns the importance of the repressed pre-Oedipal identification with the father: the desire to be 'like him', but the fear of being *the same*, that is, being like a man.

Here, perhaps, a less obvious question imposes itself. Is the boy's resolution of the Oedipal drama really as unproblematic as we assume? Could Millot's distinctions regarding the masculinity complex for women be usefully inverted to reconsider a man's relation to the feminine position? For example, does the woman who fantasises the possession of a phallus parallel the man who acts out its absence (transvestism)? Is the woman who masquerades as the feminine type, who disguises the lack of a lack, but makes no demand on her sexual partner, comparable to the man who 'does what he's gotta do', who 'acts like a man', although he senses the fraud and, in fact, has no sexual desire for the woman? Also taking up what lies on the cusp of the complex—the woman's desire for the child as phallus and the man's desire to give her this 'gift'—and what lies outside it—the failure to internalise demand which results in Don Juan's (or Don Juanita's) continual search for 'something better'—all of this begins to give substance to the Lacanian view that for both men and women there are as many forms of identification as there are demands.

Finally, I am not proposing this as an answer

³ Catherine Millot, 'The Feminine Super-Ego' (trans Ben Brewster), *m/f* 10, 1985, pp 21-38.

⁴ Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.

to the third objection. I am suggesting that the way this exhibition frames the questions of sexuality and representation allows us to rethink, rather than repeat, the feminist arguments on which that issue is founded. In this sense, the show's strategic sameness makes present and

meaningful what is often only a rhetorical plea for a postmodernism of resistance.

107

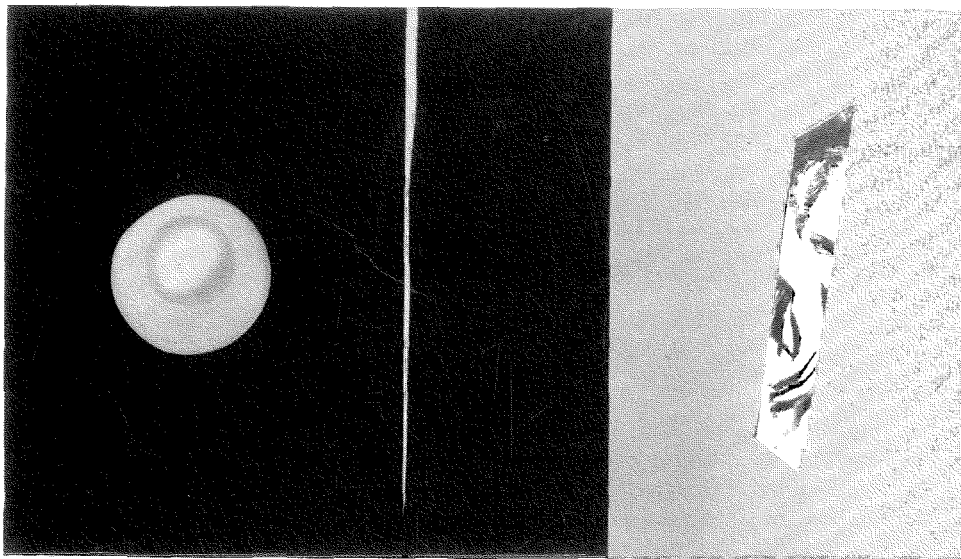
This article is the revised version of a talk given at the London Institute of Contemporary Arts, October 3, 1985, during the exhibition, *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality*.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FELICITY COLLINS teaches film theory and criticism at Melbourne College of Advanced Education in Australia.... **STUART CUNNINGHAM** is a lecturer in film and media at Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia.... **DONALD GREIG** studied film at the University of Kent. He is a professional singer and a member of the Tallis Scholars.... **ROSS HARLEY** is a freelance writer and film and video-maker based in Sydney, Australia.... **MARY KELLY** is an artist who lives and works in London. Her current project, *Interim*, has recently been exhibited at the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh and the Riverside Studios in London.... **YVE LOMAX** teaches in the Film and Photography Department of the London College of Printing. She is currently preparing a major exhibition of photography, *The World Is A Fabulous Tale*.... **AIMEE RANKIN** is an artist and critic who lives in New York. She has contributed to *Art Network* and *Art in America* and her next exhibition, entitled *Ecstasy*, is scheduled for March '87.... **JACKIE STACEY** is researching a PhD in film at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham.... **DUGALD WILLIAMSON** teaches Studies in Culture and Politics in the School of Humanities, Griffith University, Brisbane.

BROKEN LINES: MORE AND NO MORE DIFFERENCE

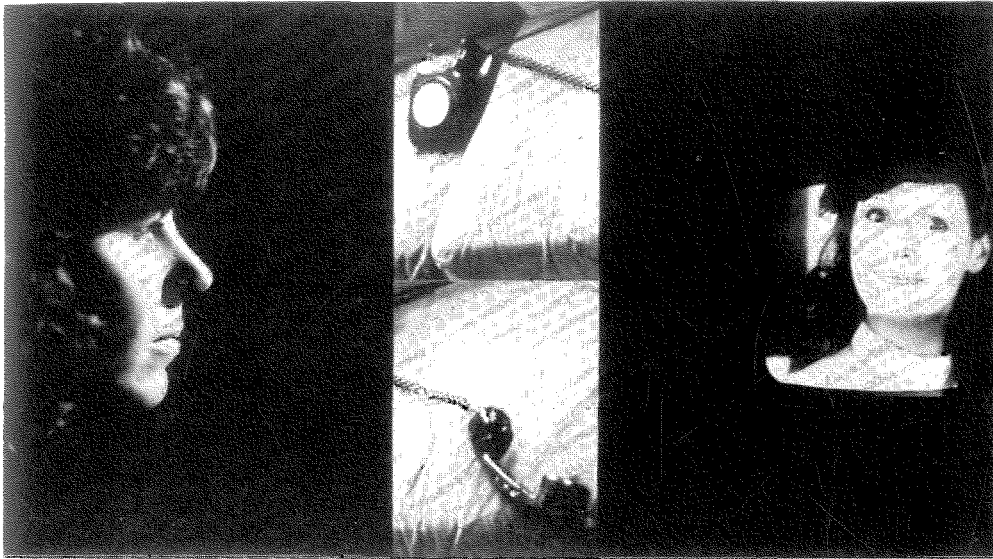
TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS
BY YVE LOMAX



What more difference is there than between boys and girls. The difference, obviously. The D-i-f-f-e-r-e-n-c-e. Want me to repeat that difference? Hoping that if I repeat that difference it will stay as the truth. Hoping that if I repeat, I will accept it as the Truth. The truth is that which can be repeated. True. Truth loves to be repeated. That way it can keep itself true. Menacing repetition.

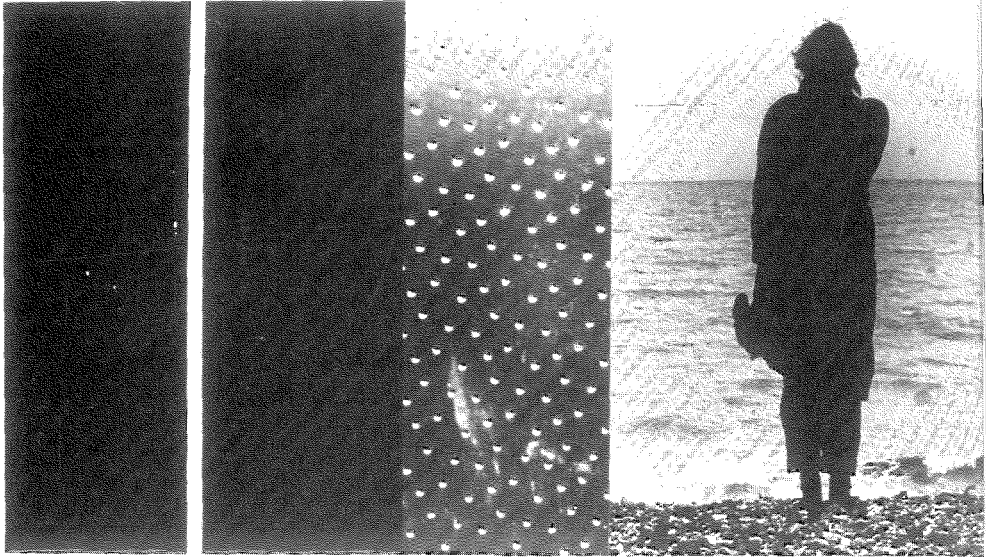
Want me to obviously accept the difference. Want me to accept it as the most obvious difference. Too clear to be called into question. Obviously want me to face the sun! Obviously want to blind me with the obviousness of it all. The sun cannot, on pain of blindness, be stared at directly. Want to blind me with the obviousness of it all. Blind me here. Then bind me here. Then can always find me here. Stuck. Struck by the obvious 'power' of the sun.

Want to blind me with the obviousness of it all? Want me to think that if the girls don't want to be the same as the boys, if the girls don't want to be subsumed by the same, if the girls want to be other than the same, they have got to, obviously, insist upon the difference. Spell it out. Straight. The D-i-f-f-e-r-e-n-c-e. But insisting on the difference, blinded by the obvious. Blinded, then stopped. Then at a standstill. And standing still, easy to find. And then always found where expected to be found. No worry. No trouble. No harm done. Insisting upon the difference, then all can carry on the same. The Sa-Am-Me. Ask me who I am, ask me to confess and spell it out, but don't expect me to remain the same. The Sa-Am-Me. Menacing repetition.



The difference between two: one will always repeat the other, and repeating the other, will allow it to return and carry on the same. Menacing repetition. Petition for the difference, insist upon it, but the obverse may always return. And then on the back of the difference, end up endorsing the same, endorsing its repetition.

Don't want to be subsumed but why insist upon The Difference. Be valorous, valorise the difference, give it more value but the price has always been fixed. Why insist upon the difference which en-titles us to be girls and boys. Why insist and be titled. Why entitle something to find you always in the same position. Why entitle a title to reduce you to just one position. Why subsume everything else to that one position. It will always bring you down to less and not much more. Why subsume



than Many of the One. Many differing differences. More differ-

ence. The line breaks. Differ-ence breaks into many lines. Not just a multiple of one. Many differ-ring lines. Many breaking lines. Many broken lines. Many lines breaking into differ-rent lines. A movement of becoming. Becoming more and not less. Not reducible to just one. The line breaks. Differ-ring lines. The ring interrupted, we no longer return to an interior point, an essential centre whose presence totally determines and delimits the outside. Differ-rence: open rings. The beginning and the end breaking and making more: an exploration of the means, of the 'middle'.

